GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

FAMILY STORIES ABOUT SCHOOLING AND LEARNING

by

JAQUELINE HO HOCK NEO SHOEMAKER

(Under the Direction of Martha Allexsaht-Snider)

ABSTRACT

Using Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory as an overarching frame, this study explored social and cultural factors that influenced how grandparents raising grandchildren engaged in their grandchild’s learning and schooling. Narrative case studies and cross-case analysis with six families illustrated the ways in which grandparents’ life experiences affected the way they parented their grandchildren and investigated grandparents’ role construction, funds of knowledge, and social networks. Just like other parents, grandparents have high aspirations for their grandchildren. The grandparents’ eloquent voices captured in this study demonstrated the ways in which they were assertive in their endeavors to be involved participants in their grandchildren’s education. Grandparents authored and positioned themselves as advocates for their grandchildren and articulated a desire to partner and work together with teachers and school personnel for the benefit of their grandchildren. They were proactive in using the resources available in schools and in the community to help their grandchildren. Based on the results of this study, I argue that teachers and school personnel would benefit from professional learning opportunities to understand the needs of grandparents raising
grandchildren and develop practices for actively supporting and engaging them in their
grandchild’s education. Recommendations are provided for future research incorporating
the voices of grandparents who are raising grandchildren, and the educators who serve
them.

INDEX WORDS: Grandparents as parents, parent role construction, funds of
knowledge, parent-teacher communication.
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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation in loving memory and with heartfelt gratitude to
My parents, Ho Tiong Swee (1925-2008) and Chuah Niah Kiah (1932-1971);
  My parents-in-law, John and Margie (1933-2012) Shoemaker;
  My children, Ming, Shanxi, Shanlin, and Shanwei; and
  My husband, Greg - this one is for you.
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CHAPTER 1

MAKING THE CASE

Now, this...was a dizzying shock – the kind that spins you around until you are facing in a totally different direction, forever altered, and the very next step you take is a journey into foreign territories, unfamiliar landscapes. (Doucette-Dudman, 1996, p.2)

The quote above poignantly portrays the emotions, challenges, and issues grandparents experience as they raise their grandchildren. This dilemma of becoming parents for the second time around, often coupled with the emotional, social, physical, and financial challenges that grandparents encounter, only adds to what Dantas and Manyak (2010) referred to as “the complex relationships between families and schools” (p. 1) as we address the home-school dynamics with grandparents as the students’ guardians. When we look at a child’s education, we cannot deny the importance, influence, and indispensability of the family (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lareau, 2000). Research pertaining to families and schools show the importance of home-school connections and highlights the role of parents in the child's education (Allen, 2007; Fields-Smith, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Schulz, 2010).

Some researchers (Dantas & Manyak, 2010; Fields-Smith, 2005; Yeager & Cordova, 2010) have articulated the need to better understand the perspectives of diverse families. Previous work has categorized diverse families ethnically (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992), linguistically (Allexsaht-Snider, 1995; Li, 2010), socioeconomically (Lareau, 2000), and structurally as in single parent, gay and lesbian families, and divorced families (Compton-Lilly, 2010; Jeltova &
Fish, 2005; Perry, 2010), but rarely has addressed the growing trend of grandparents raising grandchildren. There is a paucity of research and hence the need for more scholarly writing on grandparents raising grandchildren, as argued by Cox (2000), Gibson (2005), and Yoon (2005), for example, and that will be the focus of my research.

**Background**

My introduction into the world of grandparents raising grandchildren actually started when I was a brand new teacher, fresh out of college. At that time all guardians of my students seemed the same to me, that is, I viewed them simply as “my students’ parents.” It hardly made a difference to me that a couple of them were grandparents. Now looking back I shudder at my insensitivity in lumping all parents and grandparents together without regard to their life experiences, wisdom, or input. It was only recently that I took a close look at the changing demographics in my school and classroom. Within a quick span of five years, I had the privilege of working with four sets of grandparents who for one reason or another were taking full responsibility and bringing up their grandchildren. I was by then a veteran teacher with fifteen years under my belt and a mother of four. I had experienced hurdles professionally and personally and so I was more mature, more humble, and not so quick to judge others.

Being the youngest of thirteen children, I did not grow up having grandparents in my life in Singapore because they passed away while I was a toddler. However, when I was seven years old, I watched my father, a 48-year-old recent widower and father of 13 children, struggle with having to raise my niece, Shuyin¹, because my eldest brother and his wife were constantly fighting and would often assume that it was alright to leave Shuyin in my father’s care for days. My siblings and I helped to take care of our very first niece. I, for one, thought it was wonderful to have a real baby to play with. None of my primary two (2\textsuperscript{nd} grade) classmates was an aunt or

¹ All names of people and places are pseudonyms.
uncle and I was so proud of being an aunt at seven years old. Little did I realize what a huge responsibility it was for my father to care for Shuyin when he had his own children to worry about while juggling two jobs to provide for all of us. Additionally, following the traditional practice in the Asian society, my father, being the oldest son, was expected to take care of his aging parents. This responsibility included the unenviable job of calling on his ten siblings to help out, most of whom were uncooperative. My father also told me later that he had to help his mother cope with her husband’s blatant infidelity and he believed that the emotional pain drove his mother to her grave.

I was oblivious and unaware of all the worries and challenges my father faced but recently I realized what an enormous impact he had on my niece even after she had migrated to Australia. Up to the day my father passed away, for 35 years Shuyin regarded her grandfather as her father and she had the utmost respect for him, always remembering to call to inquire about his health, never forgetting his birthdays, sending him gifts for Chinese New Year and Christmas, and seeking his advice in her personal and professional life. He was the first person she would visit whenever she returned to Asia. Growing up in Singapore, we were taught that our elders are to be revered, and my niece honored this tradition faithfully. Just like her, I have the utmost respect for grandparents because to me they represent the epitome of wisdom. Now as a mother, I relish and am thankful that my children are growing up with the privilege of having a strong, loving relationship with their grandparents. I see the grandparent-grandchild relationship as a very special and unique gift for both the child and the grandparent.

I am intrigued by the grandparent-grandchild dynamics and I warmly welcome grandparents into my classroom each year, encouraging them to visit and share about their lives and experiences. My students and I have been enthralled listening to their stories and learning
about how school was so different for the grandparents many years ago. For example, Mr. Liam, one of my students’ grandfather, told us about how he had to walk barefooted for two miles to get to his one room school house in Brookfield, Georgia, and the only materials in that one room school were a long chalkboard that stretched from one end of a wall to the other, some broken pieces of white chalk, and several tables and chairs that were hand-made by the families. We appreciated how these grandparents came in and willingly shared stories about themselves and about growing up in a different era. And for every grandparent that visited us, each one would inevitably steer towards talking and bragging about his grandchild and how much that grandchild was treasured.

This picture of a proud grandparent whose heart is overflowing with love for the grandchild is how most people envision a grandparent. Typically grandparents are viewed as the ones who spoil the child and who, when they get tired, hand the child back to their parents – that is the luxury and privilege of being the grandparent. Or so I thought, until I noticed a growing trend of having more and more grandparents being listed as my students’ guardians.

**Statement of the Problem**

The role of each member within a family is influenced by culture and traditions and this is often determined by societal expectations (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lareau, 2000). For example, in some societies, where both parents work, grandparents are relied on to care for the children (Yoon, 2005), while in others, grandparents maintained a more distant relationship acting as a storyteller, family historian, (Mooradian, Cross, & Stutzky, 2006) and occasional babysitter. However, in her work with grandparent caregivers, Cox (2008) found that whatever the traditional role, most grandparents raising grandchildren had never anticipated being the primary and sole caregiver of the grandchild.
Issues faced by grandparents raising grandchildren became more real to me in the summer of 2011 when I attended a monthly support group meeting for grandparents at the Community Council on Aging (CCA)\(^2\). I saw how seriously each grandparent took his or her role, asking questions and sharing their concerns, and it made me curious to investigate how each grandparent handled this heavy responsibility (Doucette-Dudman, 1996; Houtman, 2006) of being parents the second time. Even today, as a veteran teacher of twenty years, I find myself challenged to know how to relate to these grandparents. Teachers generally are not prepared to work with families (McCarthey, 2000; Norris, 2010), especially diverse families, because we have little knowledge of families different from our own and many of us hold narrow definitions of “family.” Teacher training programs (Altwerger, Arya, Jin, Jordan, Laster, Martens, Wilson, & Wiltz, 2004; Catapano, 2006) do not prepare educators well to work with diverse families (Martin & Hagan-Burke, 2002) – those from a wide range of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, gay-lesbian, and immigrant families (Dantas & Manyak, 2010; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Similarly, educators are generally unprepared to work with grandparents, and many young teachers especially may find it difficult to empathize and relate to grandparents who take on unfamiliar roles as parents of their grandchildren.

The study that I conducted focused on grandparents raising grandchildren as this is a growing trend in schools throughout the United States of America. Data obtained from Census

\(^2\) Community Council on Aging (CCA) is a non-profit organization and its mission is “to promote a lifetime of wellness through engagement, advocacy, education, and support.” CCA is funded by grants (e.g. Promoting Safe & Stable Family Grant), agency and community fund raising, private businesses, and community dollars. Grandparents Raising Grandchildren is one of twelve programs offered through CCA. Previously, it was formed to encourage grandparents to look out for their health but it has now expanded to not only include physical health but also look after the grandparents’ mental, social, legal wellbeing, as well as offer support for them to negotiate around the school system for their grandchildren’s education. They serve grandparents whose ages range from late 30’s to through 90’s, living in one of these six counties - Clarke, Oconee, Madison, Barrow, Jackson, and Walton, with Clarke having the most participants. Their main focus is the grandparents and then followed by the grandchildren. CCA provides case management service with six social worker interns from the local university working with thirty families. See Appendix K for additional information.
2010 reported that 7.8 million children, denoting a 64 percent increase since 1991, are living with at least one grandparent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2011). Zooming in on local statistics, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) reported that in 2007, 164,423 or 7.6 percent of children in Georgia were being cared for primarily by their grandparents and a majority of them did not have either parent present so the grandparent was the sole primary caregiver. This reality not only changes the demographic of the school community but it results in challenges that school personnel are often not prepared to address.

Additionally, the dynamics between grandparent and grandchild bring about challenges because the individuals represent members that are two generations apart, each with different values, expectations, and lifestyles. Moreover, most grandchildren have initially grown as a member of the family headed by their parent or parents, so that a switch to being raised by grandparents represents not only a change in routines but also a change in emotional attachments and relationships. Often, many teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators are unaware of these challenges that grandparents struggle with as the primary caregivers of their grandchildren, and educators may not know how to relate to this more mature generation of guardians.

Rationale

The purpose of my research was to explore the social and cultural factors that influence grandparents raising grandchildren as they engage with their grandchild’s learning and schooling. For the theoretical framework, I drew from Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, which I will discuss later in this chapter. I listened to grandparents’ stories about how they supported their grandchildren’s education at home and at school by examining how grandparents constructed and viewed their roles and how they thought the school could help them in their endeavors of supporting their grandchildren in their education. I examined this by focusing on
how grandparents used their funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) and their social networks (Lareau, 2000; Moll & Greenberg, 1992) to navigate through the school systems in a southeastern state, and how they negotiated their way around their grandchildren’s schooling experience through their interactions with school personnel. By interviewing them, I learned from grandparents about how they became parents for the second time around, the strengths they brought to their relationships with their grandchildren and the schools, the challenges they have faced, and the strategies they have used to address those challenges.

There is clearly a need for this study because there is little research that specifically addresses issues related to education at home and at school in grandparent-led families. The dynamics between grandparents and grandchildren is unique for several reasons. First, the individuals are two generations apart and schooling has changed more since grandparents attended or since they parented their own children. Second, there may be emotional concerns within the family because of the circumstances leading to the grandparents becoming guardians. A third and related issue is that in some families, the parental responsibility may shift between parents and grandparents so that grandparents may be uncertain of their role in the child’s education. This, in turn, may create tensions for children, parents, and grandparents.

I will use my findings to help me, the teacher, understand these phenomena so that I can effectively serve the grandparents and students in my classroom. I plan to share my findings with educators and researchers about what I have learned from families headed by grandparents. I will also share my findings with grandparents raising grandchildren, with hopes of providing perspectives and resources to support them in their efforts to engage with their grandchildren’s learning and schooling. I hope to suggest ways that teachers can draw on the grandparents’ funds of knowledge to enhance classroom instruction. The purpose of sharing my study is to learn
ways that teachers, administrators, and other school personnel can work effectively and collaboratively to support grandparents in their endeavors to raise and educate their grandchildren.

The participants of this research were grandparents raising grandchildren who are in pre-K-12 grades in two public school systems in a southeastern state in the US. One of the school systems serves a socio-economically, ethnically, and linguistically diverse population (Clarke County Unified Government, 2011) while the other serves a predominantly middle class and White population (U.S Bureau of the Census, 2011). The length of this study was 18 months: six months for data collection and transcription, six months for data analysis, and six months for writing the dissertation (See Appendix A).

Research Questions

In this study, I explored the following research question and sub-questions to listen to grandparents’ stories about raising grandchildren:

What are grandparents’ stories about their experiences raising grandchildren in relation to supporting their grandchildren’s education at home and at school?

a) How do grandparents construct and view their roles?

b) How do they use their funds of knowledge and the social network support that is available to them?

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical concepts can function as lenses that enable us to see our everyday experiences in new ways and thus lead us to very practical changes in our behavior… Like a new pair of prescription glasses, they sharpen our vision and allow us to see things as we did not see them before. (Dantas & Manyak, 2010, p.6)
Sociocultural Theory

A number of theoretical and conceptual frameworks have helped me to sharpen my vision and incorporate these frameworks into my research design regarding my study with grandparents raising grandchildren. The theoretical lens I used for my study was Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory and under this theory I incorporated the principle that knowledge is socially constructed. Building on Vygotsky’s (1978) theory, I also used the following conceptual frameworks, namely, a) funds of knowledge as a vital component, b) authoring and positioning as a means of asserting one’s place, and c) families incorporate social networks. Sociocultural theory helps us to see how the historical, cultural, contextual, and social factors shape an individual; attention to these factors will help me as researcher understand how these ideas have played out in the lives of grandparents I have studied. Vygotsky (1978) believed that individual development can only be understood if we closely study the social and cultural context of the individual since these factors make the person who he or she is and we cannot separate them; they are intertwined and interconnected. Sociocultural theory was the appropriate theoretical lens for my research because it helped me to examine the social and cultural contexts, and to look at the social and interactional dimensions of grandparents raising grandchildren.

Even as a veteran teacher, I feel unprepared to effectively help and communicate with grandparents who are raising grandchildren because my teacher training courses did not address this phenomena. In the last few years of my teaching experience as a kindergarten and first grade teacher, I have encountered an increasing number of grandparents raising grandchildren and this appears to be a growing trend in many schools. I recently invited a panel of grandparents (three grandmothers and two grandfathers) who are in the midst of raising their grandchildren to a graduate level class to talk about their experiences and to answer questions from teachers and
pre-service teachers who were students in this class. These teachers were very curious about what the five grandparents shared regarding their struggles and experiences of raising a grandchild. This opportunity is an example of how grandparents and teachers can share ideas, give feedback, and ask questions to learn from each other, thereby constructing knowledge together through their social interactions.

**Knowledge is socially constructed.** John-Steiner and Meehan (2000) stated that knowledge is both reconstructed and co-constructed in the course of dialogic interaction when we restructure knowledge within ourselves and with each other. This reconstruction can occur in several ways - when we share an event or activity with others (such as the above conversation between grandparents and teachers) or when we (or others) criticize, resist, or reject each other or the ideas we represent (such as at a rally or protest). Previous research has illustrated examples of how knowledge has been socially constructed in family and community contexts. In their work on parental engagement in urban elementary schools, Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, and George (2004) spoke about how Celia, a mother living in a high-poverty urban community, sought out resources and actively sought assistance within her community so she could help her child. Miranda, another mother in the same study, becomes “a part of the fabric of the school” (p. 7) by becoming visibly active so she could help her child, other children, and the teachers, whilst she extended her own learning to as she spent time in the classroom.

Tenery (2005) witnessed various forms of socially constructed knowledge when she visited one of her student’s (Maria) at home. She noticed how the family relied on their knowledge about home remedies, household repairs, customs, traditions, and experiences in Puebla, their hometown, and used this knowledge to cross transnational domains between U.S and Mexico for international commerce, taxes, and tourism. The parents, as agents of culture,
also used child-rearing practices that were unique to their culture to shape the children and their development, and in turn the child learned about her society and culture. Maria helped her mother cook and serve corn tortillas and mole (a traditional dish from Puebla) while her father talked about how he purchased electrical appliances and then re-sold them in Mexico. Moll and Greenberg (1992) explained that this cultural and social transmission is interactive and ever changing and the child is not unlike a cultural apprentice who is guided by his family and those around him so “knowledge is obtained by the child and not imposed by the adults” (p. 326). Hence, knowledge is co-constructed and shared in multiple directions because the relationships among family members are dynamic and each person influences others in many different forms.

This interactive social and cultural transmission not only occurs within the family but also with other members within the community. Perry (2010) gives an example of how Chol, a Sudanese refugee who was forced out of his country, sought to create his own cultural and social support in the US by embracing others. He welcomed the help of his peers in his tutoring class, his tutor, social service agents, and church members. As he gained confidence in himself and his academic skills, Chol then turned around and helped other newly arrived refugees. This social sharing of knowledge, what Gonzalez et al. (2005) refer to as funds of knowledge (p.72), is likened to the nuts and bolts of survival because “they are central to home life and to the relationship of the families to others in their community” (Moll & Greenberg, 1992, p. 326).

Chol used his funds of knowledge and leadership skills to organize community events and write columns for the Sudanese refugee newsletter, thereby developing a “family-like relationship” (Perry, 2010, p. 30) to help him and others adjust to life in a foreign country.

**Funds of knowledge as a vital component of sociocultural theory.** Using the conceptual framework that knowledge is socially constructed, Gonzalez et al.’s (2005) research
on funds of knowledge is based on the premise that students come to school with experiences that are unique to their family and their funds of knowledge. Greenberg (1989) calls funds of knowledge an “operations manual of essential information and strategies households need to maintain their well-being” (p. 2). Funds of knowledge are the family’s lived experiences and practices that can help teachers to understand the profound importance of their relationships with the families and can shape teachers’ perceptions and practices, especially when their students come from vastly different backgrounds and experiences (Moll, 2010).

Funds of knowledge are historically grounded and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills. It is the social sharing of its funds of knowledge that helps the family and its members function in society. Gonzalez et al. (2005) suggest that the conceptual framework of funds of knowledge is based on the idea that “people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them knowledge” (p. ix). They created a methodology of viewing the construction of knowledge in the daily practices of language and activities of the families of students so as to understand the ways in which people make sense of their everyday lives.

The researchers in Gonzalez et al.’s (2005) project were anthropologists and teacher-researchers who worked individually or in pairs visiting families in their homes. They interviewed each family on three different occasions and each interview had a focus, namely, family history, household activities, and the parents’ view and role construction as the caretaker. The primary objective of this ethnographic study was to foster a relationship of trust with the families so that families could candidly talk about their “messiness of life” (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. 1). Funds of knowledge work is grounded in the pedagogy of students’ lived
experiences and is viewed as being crucial in merging home lives and dominant discourses of schooling.

Gonzalez et al. (2005) gave an excellent example linking home and school by illustrating how one of the researchers, Cathy Amanti, used a family’s funds of knowledge to “[facilitate] the intellectual contribution of parents and other adults to academic lessons through the development of social networks for teaching” (Moll & Greenberg, 1992, p. 345) by incorporating what she had observed during a home visit into her classroom instruction. Amanti had noticed Carlos selling candy to his peers and she recognized the wonderful learning opportunity that was presented. She envisioned how she could use candy, a topic of interest for the students, to teach math concepts such as arithmetic, graphing, sorting, and comparing. Upon further conversations with the class, she also discovered that another parent, Mrs. Rodriguez, made candy at home and so Amanti invited Mrs. Rodriguez to come in and teach the class how to make and market candy (Gonzalez et al., 2005, pp. 82-84).

This parent participation not only gave the teacher and students an appreciation of the knowledge of the parent but it also provided an additional context for learning (Moll & Greenberg, 1992). The teacher used what the students knew and encouraged them to inquire and explore further through research and discussions, to construct and re-construct their ideas and knowledge, thereby helping the students to expand their zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) while using their funds of knowledge.

This research on funds of knowledge is applicable to my study because I want to investigate the ways that grandparents’ funds of knowledge might be a valuable asset to their grandchildren, teachers, and schools. My challenge is to learn how to incorporate and invite grandparents to share their funds of knowledge with my students and other teachers in our joint
efforts to educate their grandchildren. Monzo (2010) suggests teachers need to recognize the resources and funds of knowledge students bring to the classroom and provide the scaffolding that would allow children to succeed academically so that eventually they can be independent learners and confidently proceed on their own, feeling pride in what they do know and can do. Teachers might construct learning settings so that grandparents’ funds of knowledge could serve as mediations for children’s learning. Incorporation of grandparents’ funds of knowledge could help educators to facilitate the strategic connections between grandparents, grandchildren, and teachers through multiple paths between classrooms and households, and by emphasizing the interdependence of children’s learning with the socially provided resources. In this sense, mediation could help to create more advanced social circumstances for teaching and learning (Moll & Greenberg, 1992).

**Authoring and positioning are a means of asserting one’s place.** According to Barton et al. (2004), authoring is accomplished when parents, with help from others and by using tools and resources such as language, shared culture, and a close relationship with the teacher through regular contact, create their own ways of supporting their children’s learning and schooling. In my study, the grandparents sought support and advice from their relatives, neighbors, religious organizations, social services, and school personnel (teachers, counselors, administrators) to assist them in their endeavor to educate their grandchild at home and at school. Barton et al. (2004) posit that everything is intertwined and interrelated so it is suggested that we need to examine both “what” grandparents are engaged in and “how” they manage to create or accept opportunities for staying engaged in their grandchild’s education.

In their work, Barton et al. (2004) examined how parents in high poverty urban settings negotiated common understandings about beliefs and practices and built sustaining relationships
with each other and with others within the school, especially when their beliefs differed from others’ expectations. I used a similar framework by looking at how grandparents engaged in a very personal way in their grandchildren’s education by authoring personal spaces within schools and classrooms in which they were able to activate interactive capital by “being there in the classroom and school” (Barton et al., p. 9).

As a consequence of authoring their own personal spaces in school settings, I anticipated that grandparents would also engage in positioning themselves with their grandchild and teachers. The practice of positioning, as discussed by Barton et al. (2004) illustrates how grandparents can use new space to influence others. It describes how individuals and community both stand in a dynamic relationship with each other and draw from the different forms of capital to gain relative position of power, influence, or control within these relationships and spaces.

The authors gave an example of this when they described one of the participants in their study, Celia, who cleaned house for the principal of a private school. Celia observed, asked questions, and noted how this principal taught her children at home and she also noticed the types of homework that the children did. From her observations, she noticed that they seemed to get more challenging work and she questioned the lack of equity that her child was getting so she approached her child’s teacher to “claim a right for more dynamic, challenging, and equitable education for her son” (p. 9). Celia’s questions signified her awareness that the quality of education and equality in education is tied to economic and political factors. Her orientation to action and not just her action alone gives her engagement and deep satisfaction as she advocated for her child. Celia was activating a specific type of interactive capital, in a personal way that required “parents to be present, observant, and willing to intervene” (Barton et al., 2004, p. 9).
Authoring and positioning are important themes for my study because I anticipated and saw how grandparents who are raising grandchildren engaged in these activities as they negotiated their way in their interactions and relationships with school personnel. As illustrated above, Barton et al. (2004) explain that there is a relationship between authoring and positioning through responsibilities and roles because parents (and grandparents) both position themselves and may be positioned by others within the spaces in which they engage in. However in a variety of ways, parents (and grandparents) can also author new or distinctive roles and spaces for themselves and may often be highly engaged within these self-created sites. Celia, for example positioned herself as her child’s advocate and partner in education as she worked with her child and the teachers.

I am aware that the way parents (grandparents) position themselves or are positioned may change over time with changing spaces and changing access to resources. Other researchers with family, school, community interactions have drawn on Vygotskian theory to develop some new constructs (Dantas & Manyak, 2010) and ways of viewing family-school interactions (Tenery, 2005) that I found to be useful as I designed and conducted my research, helping me to frame research and interview questions and then to analyze the data I collected. I utilized their frameworks in a new context with grandparents raising grandchildren, and so I was able to demonstrate their utility in this new context, and also developed some new understandings of the conceptual/theoretical frameworks to offer to the field. This is where the importance of the grandparents’ social networks and practices of reciprocity will play a vital role in their position within each relationship.

Families incorporate social networks. Families control their resources through social relations that connect households to each other and facilitate, among other functions, the
transmission of knowledge among themselves. These socially mediated transactions or exchanges of funds of knowledge are multi-stranded and flexible in that they involve many people and can be arranged and readjusted depending on the specifics of the participants. Moll and Greenberg (1992) used sociocultural theory to explain the dynamics of the social networks that parents (and grandparents) may utilize as they interact with others. These social networks consist of multiple relationships, bidirectional exchanges, and mutual support and exchanges that are not limited to kin but also incorporate non-relatives and different age groups (Compton-Lilly, 2010; Perry, 2010). Social networking allows families to form social contexts for transmission of knowledge, skills, information, cultural values and norm (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Lareau, 2000; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992) through their relationships and interactions with each other.

The exchanges within these relationships and interactions can be reciprocal and this reciprocity establishes and maintains the necessary trust among participants to keep the system active and useful. Members within a social network may seek help within the community from someone who already possesses the knowledge so they can tap their expertise without having to learn the knowledge themselves. For example, in the neighborhood when Tran needed help with electrical wiring, instead of going to a formal establishment such as an electrical company, Tran could ask his next door neighbor, Ali, who is trained in this line of work to help install a ceiling fan. On another occasion, Ali, the electrician, may seek Tran’s help to build a tree house for his daughter. This exchange of services may also be seen as a form of reciprocity, an important tenet in sociocultural theory. This interdependence and reciprocal relationship stands in contrast to the typical teacher-student individualistic structure within many American classrooms where students are usually taught to be independently sufficient and are not encouraged to rely on others.
Social networking and reciprocity are important conceptual frameworks for my study because these practices abound in our everyday lives and may offer insight to educators seeking to better understand how to support grandparents raising grandchildren. Grandparents rely on others and in turn they help others, and this applies to the rearing and educating of grandchildren. Moll and Greenberg (1992) described social networks as the “harnessing (and distribution) of social resources” (p. 344) among many people who network and share skills for survival. This social interaction can be like a web of influence where “we stay close by helping each other in times of need” (p. 322) and it highlights the multiple, rich, and thick social relationships with the family and community. Basically, it can be described as a form of social distribution where families share their funds of knowledge so everyone benefits from and has access to the community’s funds of knowledge.

Additionally, reciprocity is a key characteristic of social exchanges because it is “the glue that maintains the structure of the important social relationships” (Moll & Greenberg, 1992, p. 326) within a social network. It is similar to what Gonzalez et al. (2005) saw in their funds of knowledge study and coined it as confianza or the reciprocal exchange relations that form social networks among households. Moll and Greenberg (1992) state that these reciprocal relationships may often develop in response to difficult economic times as members within a community seek to help each other out. They state that these networks (a) act as a buffer against uncertain and changing economic circumstances by facilitating different forms of economic assistance and labor cooperation to cut the family’s expenses from using formal business establishments (car repair shop or plumber), (b) function to “penetrate” labor markets (so kinship employment and helping kin get a job in the same company is common), and (c) serve important emotional and service functions (childcare or relationship advice). Reciprocity, therefore, expresses and
symbolizes social interdependence and represents an attempt to establish a long-term social relationship.

Sociocultural theory has helped me to explore how grandparents who are raising grandchildren constructed their roles through the use of various social and cultural tools. By looking through the sociocultural theory lens, I was able to investigate how grandparents use their socially constructed knowledge and funds of knowledge to interact with teachers and school personnel by authoring spaces and positioning themselves in their relationships with their grandchild and their teachers. I was able to observe and learn from them about how they articulated and shared what they knew and how they used their social networks when faced with the challenges and rewards of raising and educating a grandchild.

It was my hope that by interviewing grandparents to listen to their stories, “we become real people to each other rather than shadow figures occupying our different niches” (Amanti & Gonzalez, 2005, p. 139). Through my social interactions with my participants, I wanted to create a bond between home and school by building positive, affirming, and mutually respectful relationships with them. In order to learn about their experiences about becoming parents the second time around, I used qualitative interviewing as my method of collecting data. It was an appropriate methodology for this purpose as I could record and listen attentively to their stories. As grandparents responded with personal narratives concerning their unique life courses, a “heightened historical consciousness” (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. 42) began to emerge as they share their life experiences with me. I anticipated and discovered that some “commonalities” (Seidman, 2006, p. 52) were shared among my participants because of the shared histories and experiences of raising a grandchild and that these commonalities as well as individual and family differences provided rich data for me, the classroom teacher to inspect and explore further.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with a review of literature about grandparents playing the role of parents as they raise their grandchildren and act as the child’s primary caregiver. Next, I reviewed research about parents that relates to my understanding of the research about grandparents and my understandings from some of my interactions with grandparents in my classroom and the Community Council on Aging. Finally, I summarized the findings from previous research and positioned my own research by outlining the gaps in the research literature that provided a rationale for my study.

My interest in grandparents raising grandchildren originated first from my own experiences of growing up in Singapore watching my widowed father raise my niece while he struggled to hold two jobs to provide for his family. My father took on this responsibility not by choice but it was thrust upon him while my eldest brother and his wife fought constantly for years because neither parent wanted the full responsibility of caring for their own child. Additionally, my interest also stemmed from the fact that I never grew up with any grandparents. Being the youngest of thirteen children, my maternal grandparents were already deceased before I was born and my paternal grandparents preceded me while I was a toddler.

My lack of experience of not growing up with grandparents did not stop me from forming the utmost respect and a yearning curiosity about grandparents. I am in awe of the wisdom and social status of grandparents, especially in Singapore, because the elderly are revered and looked after well. It is almost taboo and socially unacceptable to put our grandparents or parents into a
nursing home. Years later, as a mother of four, I am privileged to watch my children develop a very close and loving relationship with their grandparents.

**How Did I Get Here?**

My perception of a grandparent’s role, like that of many others, is that they spoil and love the grandchildren. Now, after teaching for two decades I find myself wondering what has become of this world as I observe more and more grandparents becoming parents for the second time around struggling to bring up their grandchildren while they juggle issues that affect their own health, emotional, social, and financial well-being. I cannot help but wonder how they cope with the challenges and many questions fly through my mind: what are the circumstances that led to this change in their role; what are their struggles; how does the age gap between grandparent and grandchild affect their relationship with each other?

**From Grandparent to Primary Caregiver**

My previous paraprofessional, who retired and is the proud grandmother of six, sent this to me describing what most grandparents feel about their grandchild:

A grandchild by definition: a grandchild is a special person in your life through a special person you gave life, a grandchild holds a special place in your heart, meant only for them to take part, a grandchild reminds you how to laugh and play just as you did before your children grew up and moved away. A grandchild is given to you as a gift from above, so show them how much they are always loved.

Ms. Abby (personal communication, September 13, 2011)

Grandparents, like Ms. Abby, love and treasure their grandchildren like no other. Grandparents are generally regarded as the loving, dependable, steady, and supportive influence (Dellmann-Jenkins, Hollis, & Gordon, 2005) that binds and connects the extended family. They are the
source of strength and communicator of family values who may stress religious orientation, service to others, and pride in one’s heritage (Dantas & Manyak, 2010). Grandparents encourage educational achievement, strong family ties, the commitment to family by instilling self-respect, discipline, and hard work in the future generations (King, Kropf, Perkins, Seesley, & Lepore, 2009; Moore & Miller, 2007; Ruiz & Zhu, 2004). The grandparent role itself is influenced by culture and traditions and in many families they may serve in one or several of the following capacities: companion, friend, story-teller, teacher, family historian, babysitter, and voluntary childcare provider offering short-term assistance (Cox, 2008; Dellmann-Jenkins et al., 2005). But whatever the role, most grandparents raising their grandchildren had never anticipated being the primary and sole caregiver of their grandchildren.

**Parenting for the Second Time Around**

The decision to take on the heavy and often long-term responsibility of care for a grandchild was often made to prevent temporary or permanent placement of grandchildren in the child welfare system (Bunch, Eastman, & Griffin, 2007). Figure 2.1 below illustrates how this new parental responsibility presented a new set of challenges and dilemmas because it affected grandparents’ well-being, lifestyles, and daily routines and this in turn impacted the grandchild and vice-versa. Parental factors that resulted in the parents’ absence, grandparent’s strong feelings of kinship, and their desire to prevent their grandchildren from entering foster care were cited as the main reasons that contributed to the grandparents’ decision to raise their grandchildren. Taking on the role of primary caregiver has a cyclical effect that has strong repercussions for the grandparents and grandchildren so it is recommended that “school personal need to be sensitive to the fact that these families have very likely experienced a recent crisis and
are going through various stages of anger, denial, bargaining, depression, and acceptance” (DeLong, 2006, p. 319).

*Figure 2.1* Factors that affect and are affected by the grandparents’ decision to raise their grandchild.

Instead of a life free of full-time childcare, more leisure time, and opportunities to explore new adventures, grandparents reported a compromise in their quality of life because their lifestyle, marriages, and friendships were affected (Bunch et al., 2007). This was because they had little time to sustain relationships with social and community networks and consequently felt a loss of freedom and isolation from their community. Some also had to cope with conflict in their relationships with their own children (Minkler, Fuller-Thomson, Miller, & Driver, 1997) but despite these challenges, many, including all of my participants, reported that they assumed the parenting role because they are “family” and they did not want their grandchildren to enter
the “system” (Cox, 2009). These families require assistance and support that would enable them to effectively carry out their new parenting roles.

From a teacher’s perspective, I frequently question how I should relate to grandparents raising grandchildren. I am torn as I watch these grandparents struggle with the surmounting challenges of raising grandchildren because this image contradicts with my Asian upbringing that reveres grandparents as the most respected members of society who deserve our utmost respect and care. This is supposed to be their time to enjoy the fruits of their labor after many years of toiling to bring up a family. A grandparent is typically thought of as the friend, companion, teacher, family historian, and voluntary provider of short-term childcare (Dellmann-Jenkins et al., 2005). It should not be the other way around where they have to parent all over again while having to cope with their own aging health and other issues related to growing old. Unfortunately, recent census data compiled in a 2009 study conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2011) indicated a rapidly growing group of grandparents raising grandchildren. The report stated that 7.8 million children, a 64 percent increase since 1991, are living with at least one grandparent. Within the state of Georgia, 164,423 (or 7.6 percent) of children were being cared for primarily by their grandparents and a majority of them did not have either parent present so the grandparent was the sole primary caregiver (American Association of Retired Persons, 2007).

Previous research (Conway, Boeckel, Shuster, & Wages, 2010; Cox, 2008; Gibson, 2005; King et al., 2009; Ruiz & Zhu, 2004) has shown that grandparent caregivers are usually women, in their 50s, with lower than average resources. It is troubling to note that the experience of raising a grandchild has become a more normative mid- or late-life role as one out of every ten
grandparents is expected to be the primary caregiver for one or more grandchildren at some point in their life (Burnette, 1999; Kolomer, 2009).

Taking on the responsibility of raising your grandchildren is an enormous commitment. There is no denying that things are different the second time around. You’re older and in a very different place in your life. The energy, stamina, patience, and enthusiasm you once had in great abundance may now be in short supply. (Houtman, 2006, p. 5)

The above quote, together with figure 2.1, illustrates how grandparent caregivers, while committed to their role, experience challenges (Bunch et al., 2007) in order to provide a safe, orderly, predictable, and organized environment for their grandchildren. Many assumed care for the grandchild as a result of problems and circumstances facing the middle generation, such as death of a parent, unemployment, child abuse and/or neglect, abandonment, divorce, mental health problems (Dilworth-Anderson, 1994; Emick & Hayslip, 1996; Taylor, Tucker, Chatters, & Jayakody, 1997), alcohol and drug abuse (Burton, 1992; Minkler, Roe, Robertson-Beckley, 1994), medical problems including HIV/AIDS (Caliandro & Hughes, 1998), incarceration (Dressel & Barnhill, 1994), teenage pregnancy, family violence, and poverty (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, n.d.).

The responsibility often comes unexpectedly, with little preparation or planning for the drastic change in lifestyle because in many cases grandparents are thrust into the role of primary caregiver due to the loss or incapacity of their own child (Mooradian et al., 2006). The aforementioned reasons were traumatic events that often led grandchildren to become at high risk to develop emotional and behavioral problems that has negative effects on their performance in school. Edwards (2006) reported that this turn of events can result in grandparents encountering significant problems related to their physical well-being and emotional adjustment
to this new family make-up as it significantly increases their responsibilities because they are now their grandchild’s primary caregiver.

**Challenges Pertaining to the Grandchild**

The reality of this alarming situation affecting many families not only changes the makeup of the school community, but it often results in challenges that school personnel are unprepared to address. They may not understand the challenging dynamics between the grandparent and grandchild, that is, the individuals represent members that are two generations apart, each with different values, expectations, and lifestyles. Often, many teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators are unaware of these conflicts and may not know how to relate to this more mature generation of guardians. These grandparents have to deal with the grandchild’s transition problems that may occur due to the sudden change in their home and social environment. According to Gibson (2005) the primary adjustment problems for children were

- a lack of appropriate maternal and paternal role models
- children’s inability to understand their current living conditions
- disparity between grandparents and grandchildren ages
- parental visits
- excessive attachment to grandparents (p. 4).

Additionally, grandparents also had to manage the grandchild’s emotional problems that strongly impacted their relationships and responses to them. The contributing factors that resulted in the grandchild living with his/her grandparent affected the grandchild’s self-worth and trust in adults to provide security. Cox (2008) also reported that often these children did not feel valued or
important and these feelings could exponentially multiply if there was a history of neglect, abuse, or rejection by the parents.

Another challenge is that the disciplinary role of parenting was especially difficult for grandparents (Weber & Waldrop, 2001). The grandchild’s poor self-esteem could also lead to their continual testing of their grandparents as a means of assuring their own value and security. Such testing could be extremely taxing to grandparents who often became weary of constantly having to assure the children while also trying to guide their behaviors. Many of these children came from primary homes that offered little or no structure. Consequently, grandparents’ efforts to restrict children’s activities could lead to rebellion and further problems that might be exacerbated during the tumultuous period of adolescence. In fact, Cox (2008) reported that it was during adolescence that many question their decisions to raise grandchildren. Parenting a grandchild can be exceptionally challenging because feelings of loss and grief over the absence of parents frequently permeate the grandparents-grandchildren relationship (and) grandparents are often unaware of the impact that the loss has on the child as children deal with loss in unique ways. Moreover, children often feel uncomfortable expressing their feelings, sometimes out of fear of upsetting the grandparents. (p. 469)

Aside from death or abandonment, loss could be compounded by parents who made constant promises to their child but did not follow through. The child may in turn act out, displacing their true feelings of disappointment with their parents through behavioral problems at school and home. On the other hand, grandparents may not be aware of the child’s feelings and may misinterpret it and cause more difficulties by meting out punishment that could potentially
increase the child’s feeling of rejection and this could in turn lead to more defiance and hostility from the child.

Kelley, Yorker, Whitley, and Sipe (2001) indicated that this parenting stress due to the grandchildren’s behavior and emotional problems may cause grandparents to be resentful or angry. They suggested that grandparents may also feel psychologically distressed and isolated and feelings of failure and doubt regarding their ability as a parent may emerge because their own child is incapable of raising his/her child. Further stress was added on if the grandparent and parent were estranged and did not part on good terms. Resentment may increase if grandparents felt they did not have much choice but to put their own needs on hold as they built their lives around their grandchildren’s schedule. This included having to plan around the school calendar so they could parent, help with homework, and cater to the grandchild’s medical, physical, and social needs.

**Grandparents’ Personal Challenges**

Apart from having to juggle the many responsibilities related to being their grandchild’s primary caregiver, these grandparents also faced other burdens - namely financial, social, and legal burdens (Kelly et al., 2001). Having another person/s under their care added to a grandparent’s financial load as it overwhelmed their existing funds. Many had little or no support from state services because they did not have legal custody and hence could not formally apply for assistance or have access to resources (Cox, 2008). This also meant that they might be limited in obtaining medical and educational services. In her study, Cox (2009) discovered that some grandparents felt a stigma and did not want to apply for Medicaid or other social services while some others who did not have legal custody were wary of legal action that may remove the grandchildren from them if they officially applied for federal aid. These challenges and worries
added a toll on the grandparent’s well-being and health. Many neglected their own social, emotional, and physical needs, and felt isolated from others due to the change in their lifestyles (Minkler et al., 1994).

In their study with African-American grandmothers, Ruiz and Zhu (2004) found that typically, African-American grandmothers had a rich social network of family and friends but the younger grandmothers tended to experience more social isolation and role conflict problems caused by demands of employment and caring for their grandchildren and this was further intensified if the grandchildren had special needs (Davis, 1992). However, even though caring for a non-biological child was a stressful task, many took on this responsibility to ensure that their grandchildren did not enter foster care (Landry-Meyer, 1999) because they were concerned about the quality of care-giving and the problems their grandchildren might have as they adjusted to their new living arrangements with practical strangers. More importantly, grandparents felt a need, a conscious obligation, to care for their own even if it meant sacrificing their retirement plans (Mooradian et al., 2006).

**Grandparents and Education**

Even though there is limited research available about the role that grandparents play in the schooling and education of grandchildren, there is much research about parent participation in children’s education that can pertain to grandparents too. Generally, just like most parents, grandparents who are raising grandchildren also want what is best for their grandchild. They try to be involved in the grandchildren’s education by being active participants in their grandchild’s learning at home and at school (Gibson, 2005). In their studies with working and middle-class parents, Epstein (1995) and Hara and Burke (1998) suggested that students who observed their parents taking an active role and interest in school-related activities, showed improved academic
achievement and they posited that parents who were involved with their children’s education were those who consistently demonstrate “good parenting skills,” communicated with the school staff, volunteered their time in the school to help their children learn at home, took an active role in school-related decision-making, and regularly collaborated with the school community.

However, other researchers (Barton et al., 2004; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, and Closson, 2005; Lareau, 2000; Sheldon, 2002) have criticized these generalized assumptions about parental involvement because they find that this traditional view short-changes the efforts of parents and grandparents who may not work in these traditional ways but who are involved in other ways. My father fell into this category - his support for his children and grandchildren would not have been evident to educators looking for traditional types of involvement, but my siblings and I (seven of whom are college graduates) are proof of his efforts. This holds true for many grandparents who are often not able to be visible in schools and classrooms because of work, health, or other family and personal issues. This certainly does not reflect and should not be seen as a lack of interest in their grandchild’s education.

Another factor that relates to school is the parents’ perception of invitations to engagement from the school, teacher, or student (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Soodak, Erwin, Winton, Brotherson, Turnbull, Hanson, and Brault (2002) found that parents felt valued and respected when schools and teachers welcomed them and attended to their concerns and suggestions. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) spoke about this when she mentioned the trepidation that many parents felt when they come to parent conferences often filled with anxiety and a desperate eagerness “to hear good news about their child’s life in school” (p. 77). Parents also wanted to be engaged in meaningful roles because they felt appreciated and empowered when they were given specific and positive feedback regarding their involvement, as described by
Fields-Smith (2005) in her study with African-American parents in a Southeastern United States school district. My deepening understandings of the ways that teachers can support parents’ engagement at school and at home with children’s learning (Lazar, Broderick, Mastrilli, & Slostad, 1999; Martin & Hagan-Burke, 2002; Norris, 2010) has led me to reflect on my own issuing of invitations to parents and grandparents, and the complexities, for some, of responding to and taking up those invitations. It has also given me ideas for issues to look into in my research with grandparents.

**Parenting Roles**

Roles are sets of expectations held by groups for the behavior of individual members and gender may be a factor in what is expected of a person. Many cultures, for example, depict the maternal figure (mother, grandmother) as the primary caregiver (Lareau, 2000; Mooradian et al., 2006; Moore & Miller, 2007) and the father as the one who does more physically demanding activities with the child, such as, in sporting activities. Just like parents, grandparents also make a choice about their role in their grandchild’s education and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) indicated that this could be explicit or implicit. It was explicit when the parents in their study were acutely aware and reflective about their decision to help as they drew on a variety of experiences and resources to interact with and participate in the child’s learning (Barton et al., 2004).

**Working with the Teacher and Not Just Alongside**

They made decisions about what role to play and how to engage in a very personal way in the child’s education. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) referred to this as “role construction.” Grandparents in different cultural groups and communities have certain sets of expectations for themselves and their children in relation to schooling (Gibson, 2005; King et al., 2009;
Mooradian et al., 2006; Ruiz & Zhu, 2004). For example, the African-American grandmothers in Gibson’s (2005) study emphasized the importance of education as a vital step to a productive life and wanted their grandchildren to focus on learning rather than on the opinions of their peers. On the other hand, Mooradian, Cross, and Stutzky (2006) discovered that the American-Indian grandparents in their research embraced the concept of “Seven Generations” which stressed the significance of intergenerational relationships and responsibilities, and the importance of continuity across generations” (p. 87) so the emphasis in education was more on ensuring that their heritage, indigenous language, culture, and way of life were taught to the next generation.

Figure 2.2 Factors that influence and are influenced by parents’ role construction.

Figure 2.2 above illustrates how parents’ role construction is influenced by several socially-constructed variables and this model can also be applied to grandparents’ role construction. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) defined role construction as parents’ beliefs about what they were
supposed to do for their child and in their research they found it affected parents’ decisions about specific desirable child-rearing outcomes. This role construction appeared to establish the basic range of activities that parents construed as important, necessary, and permissible for their own action and on behalf of the child. Parents’ construction of their parenting roles involved what they believed they were supposed to do in relation to the child’s education and learning processes (Barton et al., 2004; Henderson, 2007) including the time and effort they contributed at home and at school to help the child in their learning. Parents’ role construction was influenced by their beliefs about child development, child-rearing, and about the effectiveness of particular child-rearing practices in promoting desired outcomes (Gibson, 2005; Moore & Miller, 2007).

My father believed that as a family we would work together to help each other and he also gave us hands-on experience with taking care of others and managing a home. My older siblings were put in charge of the younger children when my father was at work and this included cooking for us and making sure we got to school on time and completed our homework correctly. As the younger ones got older, we shared the household responsibilities so that my older siblings could focus on their studies since the homework became more challenging as they moved up into higher grades. In addition, we were expected to take care of my niece’s needs such as ironing her school uniform, making sure she had clean white socks and white-chalked shoes every day, and providing her with a hot lunch before she got on the school bus.

Research (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Sheldon, 2002) reported that parents’ beliefs impacted their behavior, so if a parent believed in the traditional educational aims and goals that portray children as passive learners, and that the school should remain separate from the home, then minimal effort may be put into the parent becoming actively involved in the child’s formal schooling. On the other hand, if a parent believed that children should be brought
up to become responsible, independent thinkers, parents would engage in activities that valued and developed self-respect to build the child into an independent learner. They included in their role construction behaviors that would help assess and develop the child’s unique skills and talents.

Role construction was influenced by parents’ beliefs about how children developed, what parents should do to raise the child effectively, and what parents should do at home to help the child succeed in school. Role construction is also shaped by the expectations of individuals and groups important to the parent about the parent’s responsibilities relevant to the child’s schooling. Kroeger (2007) found that parents with more connections to other parents or grandparents within communities engaged in heightened parent-school activity, therefore, role construction was shaped by the expectations of pertinent social networks and relevant personal beliefs. Sheldon (2002) posited that parents’ role construction was socially created from the parents’ experiences over time with individuals and groups related to their child’s schooling. These often included the parent’s personal experiences with schooling (Lareau, 2000; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003), prior experiences with involvement, and ongoing experiences with others related to the child’s schooling (teachers, school personnel, and other parents) and all these factors contributed to the grandparents’ sense of efficacy.

Parents’ Sense of Efficacy

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) described efficacy as the power of parents to self-regulate thoughts about their roles and influence in a situation to determine their action plans. Since efficacy is the belief in individuals’ abilities to act in ways that will produce desired outcomes, decisions will be based on what parents believe they can do to achieve their goals. In their research work to investigate how African-American grandparents’ psychological well-being
was enhanced by intergenerational solidarity, informal social support, and spiritual, Moore and Miller (2007) found that grandparents were able to successfully cope with challenging situations if they received psychological rewards, such as increased gratification, feelings of usefulness, and increased satisfaction and pride in their own abilities to confront new challenges.

Similarly, Gibson (2005) reported that the 17 African-American grandmothers in her interview study were willing to meet challenges head on when they received, for example, good socio-emotional support and were able to maintain effective communication within their family and community. In both of the abovementioned studies, the researchers concluded that having a positive psychological well-being helped grandparents to make their decisions about involvement in their grandchildren’s lives in part by thinking about the outcomes likely to follow their actions. They developed behavioral goals for involvement based on their appraisal of their capabilities in the situation. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) noted that this concept of self-efficacy was grounded in personal experiences in four major domains:

- personal mastery experiences: success in achieving goals in the given area
- vicarious experiences: observing similar others’ success in achieving goals in the area
- verbal persuasion: encouragement from important others that one is capable of successful performance
- physiological arousal: physical and affective states that individuals process as information about the importance of given goals and personal ability to achieve them (p. 109).

Parental efficacy influenced involvement in this research because it was related to important parent attributes that also influenced student learning, including aspirations for the
child and confidence in the child’s ability to succeed (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003), parents’ abilities to negotiate a reasonable path between involvement and employment demands (Fields-Smith, 2007, 2008; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), and parents’ sense of empowerment in supporting the child’s educational interests in the school system (Fields-Smith, 2007; Lareau, 2000; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003).

Parents’ sense of efficacy influenced their belief about whether, through their involvement, they could exert a positive influence on their child’s educational outcome. The stronger parents’ perceived self-efficacy in the situation, the higher the goals they set and the firmer their commitments to realizing their goals, implying that mastery and achievement beliefs are the strongest links to their involvement. Eccles and Harold (1996) further pointed out that parents’ efficacy was made up of their confidence that they could help the child, their views of their competence as the child progresses through the grades, and their beliefs that they could influence the school. Parents with higher sense of efficacy, who believed that they are capable of helping the child succeed, would work hard to persevere and overcome challenges.

For example, in my classroom, Lola’s grandparents, who adopted her the year before she joined my class, consistently supported her at school and at home. They attended all class and school functions and her grandmother (Grace) volunteered to help in the classroom twice a month. The following year, Grace became our room-mother when I ‘looped’ up with the class. Both grandparents were consistently proactive by their attendance in regular meetings with the principal, counselor, or me, sometimes even initiating contact and meetings, to ensure that Lola received all the help she needed to show good progress and to address concerns regarding conflicts with her biological mother that they wanted us to be aware of so we could formulate
strategies to help Lola cope with her emotions as she struggled with her feelings of conflicting allegiance to her mother and grandparents.

They were involved because they believed it would have a positive influence on Lola’s learning and school performance (Sheldon, 2002). They believed that volunteering would lead to better outcomes for the child as they could help her and the other students, get to know her teachers, and learn strategies of how to help her at home; and they overcame difficulties by using their effort, skills, and resources (Barton et al., 2004) to address their concerns. They played the role of both a partner in education with Lola and her teacher, as well as advocated on Lola’s behalf, to utilize the resources that were available to enhance and aid in Lola’s intellectual, social, and personal development.

Party, a 57-year old grandmother in my study, was unable to volunteer in school due to her poor health and lack of transportation but she helped in other ways, what Fields-Smith (2008) referred to as “invisible forms of involvement” (p. 161) and these included activities that may both directly or indirectly relate to the child’s schooling experiences. Party read and shared stories, played games, prepared and used materials for instructional activities, and helped to create a science project on weather. Another participant, Shay, helped to coordinate food and games for special class celebrations, and organized photos for the class’ scrapbook. Although their physical presence in school was not evident, these grandparents worked in their homes to make contributions to both their grandchild’s learning and that of other children’s too.

A study by Fields-Smith (2005) of African-American parents in a Southeastern United States school district illustrated the concept of self-efficacy in a community setting. Parents felt they had to advocate on behalf of their children and other people’s children (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) and demonstrated a “culture of collectivism” by looking out for each other. A
grandparent I met at the Community Council on Aging (CCA) during one of their monthly support group meetings shared, “When I learn something from the teacher I tell my friends so they know what to do if they have the same problem so it is like we help each other to take care of all the children.” This same sentiment was voiced by one of my participants, Moon, when she talked about how she and other parents would call on each other to ask for help or to get feedback and advice about their concerns.

This culture of collectivism in Fields-Smith’s (2005) study was demonstrated in the ways parents advocated the practices of shared responsibility, built strong community bonds, and collectively struggled and supported each other. They believed that “successful involvement requires knowledge of the benefits of participation in school affairs and the development of a savvy network within and outside of school” (Fields-Smith, 2005, p. 134). They practiced a legacy of collective advocacy, not hesitating to voice their concerns together to the appropriate authorities when needed while at the same time they willingly supported the needs of the school. They believed that both in-class and out-of-class parent involvement were positively linked to indicators of student performance, school success, psychological processes, and attributes that support student achievement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). They valued the education of their children and made it a priority in their lives, recognizing the tremendous impact that teachers had on their children, considering that students spent most of their waking hours in school. This observation motivated parents to want to get to know teachers and to remain abreast of school events. Sheldon (2002) reported that parents’ deep commitment to their child’s education was evident in their pursuit of teachers’ assistance to help the child succeed and maximize their effectiveness for the teachers.
The parents in Fields-Smith’s (2005) study had similar aspirations for their children as any other parent (Barton et al., 2004; Hoover-Dempsey, 2005; Lareau, 2000). In contrast to some stereotypical views that circulate in the news media and in informal educators’ talk, the African American parents in Fields-Smith’s (2005) study worked tirelessly to help their child to be successful and to enable them to have opportunities and become assets in their community. They monitored their child’s progress, conducted meaningful learning activities within the family setting, and provided scaffolding for their learning so that the children could set and reach high expectations for themselves. In a later study, Fields-Smith (2008) indicated that parents sought to make connections between school learning and home-based activities, much like those illustrated by Epstein’s (1995) overlapping ‘spheres of influence’ framework for home-school partnerships. Within this model, home, school, and community existed in interdependent relationships represented by three intersecting circles. The parents in Fields-Smith’s (2005) study possessed the factors that influenced parents’ engagement in their child’s education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997), one of which was the sense of self-efficacy.

The cases Fields-Smith (2006) presented illustrated the principle outlined in Hoover-Dempsey’s and Sandler’s (1997) work, that is the higher a sense of efficacy that a parent demonstrated, the higher will her level of involvement. Parents in their study found meaningful ways to participate in school-based events and they were also active in helping their children at home to enhance and reinforce concepts learned at school, including developing the child’s decision-making and critical-thinking skills (McCaleb, 1994).

**Parents’ Life-Context and Social Networks**

Parents often sought opportunities for involvement that fit within the demands they routinely experienced (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) and were consistent with their beliefs
about the importance of involvement in the child’s education (role construction) and perceptions of their own efficacy for helping the child learn. Thus the time, energy, skills, and knowledge that parents brought to the possibilities of involvement influenced their choices and activities related to their child’s education. These life-context variables might limit or enhance what and how much they did to be engaged and involved in the child’s learning and schooling and this concept can also be related to grandparents raising grandchildren.

Additionally, the external informal social support from extended family and neighbors might provide respite to grandparents and serve as positive role models for the grandchildren (Gibson, 2005). These social networks can also ascertain the role that parents might play in their grandchild’s education (Sheldon, 2002). These social networks tied in with the important elements of the grandparents’ life context because they formed an integral part of the grandparents’ everyday life (Burr, 1995, pp. 9-10). Extended family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, religious associates, and parents of other children, all have a part in influencing grandparents’ decisions about their grandchildren. Grandparents used these networks (Barton et al., 2004) to make decisions for the child based on the information they receive from these contacts through casual conversations (Burr, 1995) or intentional inquiries (Epstein, 1995, Fields-Smith, 2005; Lareau, 2000).

Support groups such as the Community Council on Aging enhance grandparents’ well-being by helping grandparents share their small victories, identify short-term goals, recount humorous life events, and remind each other of good things in their lives (Moore & Miller, 2007). The psychological benefit of support groups (in the form of increased socialization and opportunities to share experiences with caregiver peers) may have a preventive effect that reduces risk of mental health problems for these grandparents (King et al, 2009). Mooradian,
Cross, and Stutzky (2006) offered an illustration from their study of how the extended family support provided by one of their participants’ peers in a housing complex for senior citizens helped her out by driving her to another city to see her daughter and bring gifts for her grandchildren to celebrate their birthdays.

Additionally, programs such as *Kinship Navigator* (Cox, 2009), established within the Division of Aging by the Georgia Department of Human Resources in 2006 and *Compassion in Action 2004* (Conway, Boeckel, Shuster, & Wages, 2010) addressed the needs of the growing population of grandparents raising grandchildren by supporting and advocating the tradition of families caring for their relatives. They enhanced the grandparents’ role by providing empowerment training and support groups to help grandparents cope and learn ways to handle difficulties by helping them recognize their own responses to loss and how they impact themselves and their relationships. Within the group, they explored the often profound effect that loss has had on their lives, and that of their family. Helping grandparents understand their grief process and that of their grandchildren strengthened the grandparents’ coping skills as they learned to recognize complicated and accentuated grieving that required professional assistance (Cox, 2008).

Interestingly my five participants from Oconee (Daisy, Hoke, Grace, Larry, and Moon) did not mention participation in any specific grandparent support group even though they knew of some at their churches. My connection with them helped inform them about the services provided by CCA and my numerous attempts to encourage all three of them to attend CCA’s monthly support group meetings were not successful in getting them there due to personal conflicts. I also suspected that they were not comfortable going there on their own because both Grace and Moon said they wanted to go together and each month one or both of them could not
make it. Daisy later confided in me and said that she did “not feel comfortable driving to that area” by herself.

This leads me to wonder if socio-economic factors influence grandparents’ desire to look for support groups. The responses from the abovementioned grandparents made me question if they felt they either did not need the support or perhaps they may be embarrassed to admit that they are raising grandchildren. Compared to these grandparents, the ones who did attend CCA meetings, namely Party, Shay, and Mrs. Lee, were not afraid to go out and ask and look for help. This leads me to ask if socio-economic variables have a direct correlation to grandparents seeking outside help to raise their grandchildren. Here is where future research would help to explore this aspect of grandparents raising grandchildren.

Another research work that is applicable to grandparents is the successful endeavor in Delgado-Gaitan’s (1991) study - COPLA, an acronym for Comite de Padres Latinos, or ‘Committee for Latin Parents.’ It was formed by a group of parents to help each other understand the school system and their parental rights and responsibilities. They critically reflected on their personal assumptions and decisions that guide their lives and sought to learn from others who believe that participating in the child’s learning has more to do with guiding and sharing their worldview with their children regardless of the language differences between home and school. Parents identified and confronted some beliefs about themselves that prevented them from advocating for their children in the schools. They realized that the knowledge required to participate in the child’s education was acquired in social contexts (Sheldon, 2002), and that through COPLA they could support each other in learning practices that would orient them to new beliefs about themselves.
COPLA proved to be an extremely effective support system because it empowered the Latino community into taking a more active role in their children’s education. It created a domino effect on other parents because the pioneers from COPLA played a vital role in recruiting more parents to become active participants in the school. The success of COPLA was voiced by a parent when she said, “When I first began to participate in this committee, I thought I was just doing it for my children, who are all in high school, but I soon learned that I was doing it for every child in the district because when we help ourselves, everyone benefits” (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, p. 39).

**Exploring Grandparents’ Perspectives**

Children’s development, growth, learning, health, and other qualities are influenced concurrently by the home, school, and community. Parents, or in the case of my research work, grandparents, are the child’s first educators and advocates and they are the primary and integral part of the social context that influences the child’s educational outcomes (Barton et al., 2004; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Children begin to develop and learn through their first interactions with their consistent caretakers. The eventual learning and development of basic academic skills are inextricably linked and inter-dependent and they provide the platform for higher-order learning. Through the early interactions, a bond is established that enables the child to imitate, identify with, and internalize the attitudes, values, and ways of their caretakers, and those of other people around them (Bronfenbrenner, 1998; Comer, 2001; Fields-Smith, 2007). This leads us to the practice of the community working together to help raise the child, similar to Fields-Smith’s (2008) research when she talked about how parents in her study worked together by helping, looking out for, and advocating for each other’s children as they would if they were living in a village.
So what are the grandparents’ roles at home as well as their roles in relation to the school? Most grandparents who are raising grandchildren assumed the role of primary caregiver not by choice but out of necessity because they are kin or because they do not want the child in foster care. These grandparents coped with feelings of despair caused by the contributing factors that led them to assume the primary care of the grandchild. These include death of a parent, unemployment, child abuse and/or neglect, abandonment, divorce, mental health problems, alcohol and drug abuse, medical problems including HIV/AIDS, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, family violence, and poverty. Apart from having to adapt to this drastic change in their lifestyles, grandparents raising grandchildren also had to manage issues related to their personal health and well-being while juggling those of their grandchildren’s.

These grandparents can almost be thought of as the “forgotten or invisible parents” because teachers, administrators, and other school personnel are not unfamiliar about how to work with this mature generation of care-givers. Educators often group them together with parents without considering the issues that are brought about by the two-generation gap between grandparent and grandchild. The numerous challenges that these grandparents face are daunting and they are often left to fend for themselves with little or no support from their families, community, schools, or social services.

You’re going to be fighting the battle alone at times. Your friends, even your family, will fight you for raising grandchildren. They each have their own version of how you should handle the situation, and you have to face their advice and their criticism. (de Toledo & Brown, 1995, p. 27)
Grandparents, just like parents, generally want to help their children reach or exceed their potential. They want to help the child succeed in school and many are willing to make sacrifices to achieve this goal.

Fields-Smith (2005) and Epstein (1995, 1996) found that the family-school-home model can succeed if there is mutual trust, care, and respect for each other and Fields-Smith (2009) posits that this can be achieved through mutual collaboration and cooperation. Swap (1993) eloquently articulated this ideology when she stated that

A true partnership is a transforming vision of school culture based on collegiality, experimentation for school improvement, mutual support and joint problem solving. It is based on the assumption that parents and educators are members of a partnership who have a common goal: generally, improving the school or supporting the success of all children in school. Although parents and educators may have different contributions to make to the partnership and educators may be primarily responsible for initiating it, the goal assumption is that the common mission cannot be accomplished without collaboration. (p. 57)

Teachers are the trained professionals in teaching and schooling but parents are the child’s advocate and expert of that particular child. By working together, respecting and appreciating each other’s contributions, and tapping into our resources, parents and teachers can achieve the desired goal of helping the child to be successful in school and life in general.

Through my research work, I aimed to learn and understand grandparents’ perspective on their role in their grandchild’s education so that I can work effectively with grandparent-led families. There is currently hardly any research about how grandparents construct and view their role as their grandchild’s primary care-giver. I also wanted to investigate how various factors
influenced grandparents’ sense of efficacy and how this in turn affected how and what they do to help their grandchild in his or her learning at home and at school. Using selected aspects of grounded theory (which I will elaborate upon in the next chapter) to analyze my data, I used my participants’ voices (and the voices of the grandchildren) to illuminate how grandparents overcome challenges as they endeavor to raise their grandchild in the best way that they know.

Gonzalez et al. (2005) acknowledged that families have an invaluable amount of funds of knowledge which need to be tapped into and other researchers (Compton-Lilly, 2010; Hara & Burke, 1998; Yeager & Cordova, 2010) posit that few other ideas or resources would likely impact the learning environment as much as having parents (and grandparents) become, in effect, extensions of the teachers and their classrooms (Fields-Smith, 2007; Schulz, 2010). Schools should be “more fully incorporated into the life, issues, and heart of the larger community, and in turn contribute in meaningful ways to that community. They should focus on school plans that support the child as a whole person” (Allen, 2007, p. 145). In conducting my study, I hope to make a contribution from my investigations about how grandparents viewed their role in their grandchild’s education, explore the grandparents’ perspectives about how their life experiences have helped them in their endeavors to raise their grandchildren, and inquire about how grandparents and grandchildren felt teachers and schools could help and support them in the child’s schooling and learning.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes a summary of my study; the research design; context for the study including the research sites, the participants, and the criteria for selecting participants; the methods for collecting data; my timeline; my data analysis plan; and my role as the researcher, taking into account my assumptions and subjectivities.

Summary of the Study

The three goals for this interpretative qualitative study were to investigate (1) the growing trend of grandparents raising grandchildren, (2) how grandparents supported their grandchildren’s education at home and at school by examining how they constructed and viewed their roles, and (3) how grandparents thought the school could support them in their endeavors of helping their grandchildren in their education. I used interviewing, a basic mode of qualitative inquiry, as my main method of collecting data, as it is an effective tool to help people recount and make sense of their experiences. I chose to interview because I am interested in other peoples’ stories and I want to understand their lived experiences and the meaning they make out of those experiences. Using Seidman’s (2006) in-depth three-interview model (which will be elaborated later), I encouraged grandparents to reconstruct their experiences actively within the context of their lives so I could learn about the strengths they brought to their relationships with their grandchildren and the schools, the challenges they have faced, and the strategies they have used to address those challenges.
People make meaning when they tell stories because it enables them to select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness. Seidman (2006) stated that telling stories is a meaning-making experience because “it is this process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience” (p. 7). This aligns with Vygotsky’s (1978) position that every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness. So often, if given a chance to talk, people will talk animatedly if they know that they have an attentive listener. Seidman (2006) posits that the best stories are those which stir people’s minds, hearts, and souls, and by so doing give them new insights into themselves, their problems, and their human condition.

Asking participants to reconstruct details of their experiences required them to select events from their past and impart meaning to them. I anticipated this interviewing process to be an emotionally challenging task because it would entail grandparents having to reminisce about their past, re-live both pleasant and painful experiences, and reflect on what is to come. In this interpretive qualitative study using interviews and a family collage activity, I explored the following research question and sub-questions to listen to grandparents’ stories about raising grandchildren:

1) What are grandparents’ stories about their experiences raising grandchildren in relation to supporting their grandchildren’s education at home and at school?
   a) How do grandparents construct and view their roles?
   b) How do they use their funds of knowledge and the social network support that is available to them?
Research Design

The decision to design my research as a qualitative case study stemmed from my intention to incorporate a socio-cultural/ethnographic theoretical/methodological lens that linked to my goal of understanding the grandparents’ and grandchildren’s perspectives, and my interest in the sociocultural contexts and social interactions and networking aspects of my participants’ stories. Since the purpose of my research was to explore the social and cultural factors that influenced grandparents raising grandchildren as they engaged with their grandchild’s learning and schooling, a number of theoretical and conceptual frameworks were incorporated into the research design of my study.

The theoretical lens I used for my study was Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory because this theory takes into account the influence of historical, cultural, contextual, and social factors that shape an individual. Vygotsky (1978) believed that individual development can only be understood if we closely studied the social and cultural context of the individual. These factors make the person who he or she is and we cannot separate them as they are intertwined and interconnected. Interviewing allowed me to listen to grandparents’ stories about how they supported their grandchildren’s education at home and at school by examining how grandparents constructed and viewed their roles and how they thought the school could help them in their endeavors of helping their grandchildren in their education.

I examined this by focusing on how grandparents used their funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) and their social networks (Lareau, 2000; Moll & Greenberg, 1992) to navigate through the school systems in a southeastern state, and how they negotiated their way around their grandchildren’s schooling experience through their interactions with school personnel and others within their community. By interviewing them, I was able to learn
from these grandparents about how they became parents for the second time around, the strengths they brought to their relationships with their grandchildren and the schools, the challenges they have faced in raising their grandchildren, and the strategies they have used to address those challenges.

Selection of Participants

I intentionally chose to find participants from Oconee and Clarke Counties because these two counties represent a range of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds (Clarke County Unified Government, 2011; U.S Bureau of the Census, 2011) that would represent the diversity of the population of grandparents raising grandchildren nationally (Conway et al., 2010). Table 3.1 below provides the demographic information for both Clarke County and Oconee County.

Table 3.1 Demographic Information for Clarke and Oconee Counties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Clarke County</th>
<th>Oconee County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>116,084</td>
<td>33,366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>47.4% male, 52.6% female</td>
<td>48.7% male, 51.3% female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age</td>
<td>26.6 years old</td>
<td>35.0 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduates</td>
<td>84.3% (2006-2010)</td>
<td>88.7% (2006-2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree or higher</td>
<td>41.58% (2006-2010)</td>
<td>44.9% (2006-2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons below poverty level</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Racial Makeup</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>61.8%</td>
<td>89.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information obtained from 2010 Census (US Bureau of Census, 2011) statistics

I was introduced to the grandparents from Community Council on Aging (CCA) through the suggestion of one of my doctoral committee professors. After making initial contact with Katie, the person in charge of the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren support group, I asked to attend their monthly meeting in the summer of 2011. The grandparents who attended the
meetings were predominantly African-American and identified as from poor or working class backgrounds. During the two meetings that I attended, I noticed and learned from their discussions that these grandparents brought a wealth of life experiences and a diversity of work experiences to the task of raising a second generation of children. Katie and the grandparents decided that they would like to participate in the interview research with me, agreeing that they had important perspectives to share and that my approach to the research had potential for helping them articulate those perspectives.

I also wanted to recruit grandparents in Oconee County because, coming from a predominantly White and middle class community, they too represent the diversity of the population of grandparents raising grandchildren nationally (U.S Bureau of the Census, 2011). In addition, I live and work in Oconee County and anticipated having little difficulty in gaining access to participants, particularly since my school system had approved my general plan for research. In my first four years of teaching in Oconee County, I had four sets of grandparents in my classroom who were the guardians of my students. The grandparents who I have had in my classroom have all had to raise only one grandchild, and in all four cases it was due to their parents’ substance abuse, which resulted in the parents losing their parental rights or voluntarily abandoning their child. The four sets of grandparents I have known in Oconee County were either employed in or retired from white collar jobs.

My planned “purposeful sampling” (Seidman, 2006) enabled me to interview groups of grandparents from differing socioeconomic and ethnic contexts, who shared the common experience of raising their grandchildren. Even though my participants may have come from different backgrounds, their experiences as a grandparent raising grandchildren connected them
to each other as they shared both differences and commonalities in structure and social forces; I hoped to identify patterns in those experiences that could be explored.

I invited both grandmothers and grandfathers to participate in my study, but I was also aware that the majority of grandparents raising grandchildren are grandmothers (Conway et al., 2010; Cox, 2008; Gibson, 2005; Ruiz & Zhu, 2004). Even though my sample size was small, I believe it is representative of the larger population of grandparents raising grandchildren, because despite the differences in the two counties from which I recruited participants, there are commonalities that the grandparents shared and these are typical of those found with other grandparents raising grandchildren in the United States. Both groups of grandparents took on this role of raising their grandchildren out of necessity because of their adult children’s life choices that resulted in the parent being absent due to premature death caused by homicide, substance abuse, or abandonment of their young children. Regardless of the reasons, these grandparents did not want their grandchildren in foster care (Landry-Meyer, 1999) and so they took it upon themselves to raise their grandchildren.

**Recruitment of Participants**

I contacted the Community Council on Aging (CCA) in spring 2011 to help me identify participants in the Clarke County area. That summer, I attended CCA’s “Grandparents Raising Grandchildren” monthly support group meetings and the director, Katie, invited me to talk to the group to share about my research work and invite the grandparents to participate (see Appendix B). At the first meeting that I attended, three grandparents voluntarily signed up to be in my study and at the second meeting the following month, one more volunteered. After my Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was approved, I called each grandparent to make an appointment but was only able to contact two of them. The telephone numbers given by the
second and third grandparents were no longer in service and CCA did not have any forwarding address or current telephone number. Fortunately, I was able to recruit my third CCA grandparent when I visited an undergraduate class and she was a guest speaker. This particular grandmother, Party, became a significant participant in my study and is one of my case studies that will be presented in chapter four.

Recruiting grandparents from my school system took a little longer because of the system’s protocol (see Appendix C). Having had four sets of grandparents who are raising grandchildren in my classroom in my four years at Oconee County Schools, I inquired as to the number of similar situations in the ten schools in the county. My principal estimated that we probably had at least a couple of grandparents raising grandchildren in each school in our district. When I began the research, I had planned to send an email (see Appendix D) to all the principals asking them to let me know the number of grandparents who are raising grandchildren in their individual school so that I could give them a letter (see Appendix E) to send home that described my study and included an invitation to participate. Grandparents who were interested in participating could mail their contact information directly to me in a stamped self-addressed envelope, which I provided. I would then follow-up with a phone call to initiate personal contact, answer any of their questions, and set up an appointment for our first interview.

Because principals are generally bombarded with many emails within a day, the assistant superintendent for instruction, Mrs. Cart, suggested that it would be better if she herself emailed them about my study. When I did not get any response after waiting for two weeks, I emailed Mrs. Cart, and she said she would personally talk to the principals at their weekly principals’ meeting the next day. She also suggested I send them another email which I did and after giving the schools one month to respond, I only heard from two principals who said they did not know
of any grandparents in their schools who were raising grandchildren. Because my numerous attempts to recruit participants through the school system were unsuccessful, I then turned to my personal contacts and was able to recruit four grandparents from my county. Through snowball sampling (Glesne, 2006), I was able to invite three more participants but out of these three grandparents, two declined the invitation due to personal conflicts and only one was able to participate. Table 3.2 below provides demographic information for my participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grandparent</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Socio-economic Status</th>
<th>Grandchild/Age</th>
<th># Yrs</th>
<th>Legal status</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Clarke</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>11th grade</td>
<td>Working class</td>
<td>Diego, 13 Mary, 11 Marilyn, 8 Dora, 6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Adopted</td>
<td>Drugs, Incarceration, Abandonment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>Oconee</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>B.BA</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>Anna, 21 Denny, 19 Boolie, 16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Domestic violence/Death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoke (Daisy's husband)</td>
<td>Oconee</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>B.Ed</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Domestic violence/Death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Lee</td>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>High Sch.</td>
<td>Working class</td>
<td>Melia, 5 Joshua, 3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Domestic violence/Death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Oconee</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>B.Ed</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>Lola, 10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Adopted</td>
<td>Drugs, Incarceration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larry (Grace's husband)</td>
<td>Oconee</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>B.Ee</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Adopted</td>
<td>Drugs, Incarceration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moon</td>
<td>Oconee</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>High Sch.</td>
<td>Working class</td>
<td>Great grandchild Brooke, 10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Temporary</td>
<td>Abandonment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shay</td>
<td>Clarke</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>Kalee, 15 Devon, 14 Pinky, 13 Brock, 10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Informal Temporary</td>
<td>Domestic violence/Death</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants: After obtaining their signed consent (see Appendix F), I interviewed a total of eight grandparents (six grandmothers and two grandfathers who were spouses of two of these grandmothers) who are raising grandchildren who are in K-12th grade schools in two counties in
a southeastern state in the USA. Three participants were selected from the CCA grandparents support group and five participants came from my own school system. This selection process enabled my study to have representation from different socioeconomic, educational, and racial backgrounds. There is also diversity in the ages of the grandchildren (3 to 21 years old), range in the number of years they have been under their grandparents’ care (2 to 11 years), and the reasons that propelled the grandparents to take responsibility for their grandchildren. I also interviewed the grandchildren and recorded the grandparent-grandchild interactions and conversations during the Family Collage activity.

**Duration:** The data collection occurred over six months from October 2011 – March 2012. I conducted three interviews per participant at a location and time that was convenient to the participants and each visit lasted between 60-90 minutes and was spaced out from between a couple of days to a week apart (depending on the participant’s schedule). The third interview also included the family collage activity. The entire research process was completed in 17 months: six months for data collection (conducting and transcribing interviews), six months for reviewing and analyzing data, and five months for further data analysis and writing of my research work (see Appendix A).

**Data Collection Methods**

I used interviewing as my primary method of collecting data using a semi-structured interview protocol to guide our conversation as it helped me to obtain descriptions of my participants’ lives in order to interpret the meaning of their experiences of raising grandchildren. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), “An interview is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose…it is a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge” (p. 3). Interviewing allowed me to ask questions while carefully
listening to the responses and observing body language with the purpose of obtaining targeted information as prescribed by my research questions (Seidman, 2006). A semi-structured interview protocol helped me to guide the conversations by introducing the topic, critically following up by posing questions related to my participants’ answers, and encouraging them to provide reasons to support and illustrate their ideas, feelings, events, and challenges so they could reflect on and give in-depth responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Interviewing Grandparents and Grandchildren

Following the guidelines suggested by Seidman (2006), I used the 3-interviews model using an open-ended and semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix J) to encourage grandparents to narrate their personal experiences and to place them in context. The Family Collage activity described in the next section was conducted with each grandparent’s grandchild during the third interview. The stories I elicited from all three interviews, together with notes from my researcher’s journal, provided rich data that I used to answer my research questions.

Interview one focused on the grandparent’s personal history and stories up to the time when she or he became the primary caregiver for the grandchildren. This interview provided contextual information about grandparents’ experiences to situate their present position as the adult who is responsible for their grandchild. I encouraged participants to narrate a range of constitutive events in their past that placed them as a grandparent raising grandchildren.

Interview two was conducted to elicit concrete details of the grandparents’ present lived experiences in raising and educating their grandchild. This interview allowed participants to reconstruct the details of their experiences within the contexts in which they occurred. I asked grandparents to reconstruct a day in their life from the time they woke up till the time they went to bed so that I could visualize and understand the details of the grandparent’s typical day of
raising and educating his or her grandchild. In this interview, I inquired about grandparents’ experiences in the context of their social settings (their relationships with their grandchildren, teachers and administrators, other family members, and members of their social network). I explored challenging situations that they have faced in their endeavors to help in their grandchild’s learning and schooling at home and at school. I asked them to talk about the actions and decisions they made in light of these challenges.

**Interview three** was used to encourage participants to reflect on the meanings attached to their experiences raising grandchildren. Participants were asked to explore the past so as to reflect about the future by looking at how the factors in their lives interact to bring them to their current position as the guardians of their grandchildren. In a sense, they were “making meaning” (Seidman, 2006) of their experiences and establishing conditions for reflecting upon what they were doing now in their lives. At the end of this interview and after obtaining signed permission (see Appendix G) and assent (see Appendix H and I), I invited the grandchild to work with his or her grandparent to create a family collage to depict aspects about their family that they would like teachers to know about. I provided the materials for the collages using pictures from magazines and if available, I asked to make copies of family photos beforehand. I also conducted an informal interview (see Appendix J), much like a conversation, with the grandchild to get their perspective on being raised by their grandparent. It was my hope that this third interview with the grandparent, family collage activity, and short interview with the grandchild would enhance the clarity of both the grandparent’s and grandchild’s experiences and would offer me some insights as to how teachers and school personnel could assist grandparents in their roles of raising grandchildren.
Creating a Family Collage

These grandchildren played a vital role in the lives of these grandparents and I chose to include their perspective in my study because they provided valuable data and their input allowed me to triangulate my data. Hence, I planned for them to be involved in an engaging shared activity of creating a family collage that they could collate together with their grandparents. This collage would become their personalized depiction of what they wanted to share with teachers and educators about their lives and experiences of being raised by their grandparents. With their permission, I videotaped and audio-recorded this activity and either during the family collage activity or immediately after, I interviewed the grandchildren to get their perspective about living with a grandparent as a guardian and asked them how they thought their grandparent has helped and is helping them with their learning and schooling. Depending on the age of the child, this interview became an informal conversation as they engaged in the collage activity. I encouraged them to share about their struggles, challenges, and triumphs so I could learn about the grandparent-grandchild relationship through the unique perspective of the child.

Grandparents’ Feedback and Participation

An unexpected source of data emerged when I invited my participants to my oral defense of the dissertation and six out of eight were able to attend. The grandparents spoke about the importance for them of recognizing that there were others who had experiences and concerns similar to their own, shared information about resources with each other, and provided helpful suggestions to teachers and educators in the room about how grandparents raising grandchildren could be more effectively supported in the school context. Their insightful feedback and
impromptu discussion that followed provided invaluable data and powerfully validated their roles in the research.

**Data Analysis**

The final product in an interpretive qualitative study is shaped by the data that is collected and the analysis that accompanies the entire process. Merriam (2009) explained that researchers begin their research after identifying the problem and selecting a purposeful sample to collect data that will assist in addressing the problem. We do not know what will be discovered, what or whom to concentrate on, or what the final analysis will be like until we start analyzing the data as we collect them. According to Merriam (2009) data analysis is the process of making meaning out of data by consolidating, reducing, interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has read and seen. (It) is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning and between description and interpretation. These meanings, understandings, and insights develop to become the findings of the study. (p. 176)

In qualitative research, the process of data collection and analysis is emergent, recursive, and dynamic so the collection and analysis is an on-going simultaneous process which intensifies as the study progresses and once all the data is in.

**Using Aspects of Grounded Theory**

To explore and analyze my data, I selected aspects of grounded theory, namely constant comparative analysis, and specifically, coding, memo writing, and theoretical sampling, to inquire and inform my data analysis method and to help me sift through the information. Grounded theory uses a systematic methodology to develop a theory grounded in data that is
gathered and analyzed simultaneously. Thus the theory evolves during actual research through close examination of data and continuous interplay between analysis and data collection.

Grounded theory is a fluid process because the researcher moves back and forth between analysis and data collection to see if new situations fit into the theory, how they fit, or how they might not fit. Strauss and Corbin (1998) posit that grounded theories are “grounded directly and indirectly on perspectives of the diverse participants toward the phenomena (being) studied” (p. 173) so the researcher “derives a general, abstract theory of process, action or interaction grounded in the views of participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). The first step is data collection through a variety of methods such as interviews, observations, artifacts, and other documents. The data are then coded, a process that will be discussed in more detail shortly, but it basically means that the researcher identifies and creates codes for key points from the data and then she groups codes into similar concepts for easier management of ideas and creates categories, and finally she shows the relationship of these concepts to form a theory.

Through the use of multiple stages of data collection and the refining and connecting of categories of information (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), grounded theory allows researchers to understand people’s experiences in a rigorous and detailed manner. This theory connects participants’ perspectives with patterns and processes of action/interaction that in turn are linked with carefully specified conditions and consequences. According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), grounded theory is a recurring process by which the researcher becomes more and more “grounded” in the data and develops increasingly richer concepts and models of how the phenomenon being studied really works as she analyses the data.

These authors explain that the final product of grounded theory is “often displayed through presentation of segments of text – verbatim quotes from informants – as exemplars of
concepts and theories. These illustrations may be prototypical examples of central tendencies or they may be exceptions to the norm” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 280) and may be displayed through the use of semantic networks or concept maps to show the researcher’s theoretical results that depict the relationships among the major categories. Constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling are the central features of grounded theory that are employed to assist in highlighting the similarities and differences of information in these relationships.

Using constant comparative to analyze data. The constant comparative method of data analysis is an inductive and comparative methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). It allows researchers to compare categories, properties, and hypotheses and create links that may emerge from the data as they analyze their findings. For example, I used data from my first interview and field notes and compared them with those from the next interview and field notes. Additionally, I also compared the notes from one participant’s first interview to another participant’s first interview. These comparisons led to tentative categories that were then compared to each other and to other instances by posing questions pertaining to the when, why, and what conditions where these themes occurred. When creating new codes I was mindful of and I checked on previously coded text to see if they were relevant. I used newly gathered data to compare with previously collected data and their coding in order to refine the development of theoretical categories because the purpose is to test emerging ideas that might take my research into new directions (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Constant comparison within and between themes and levels of conceptualization that emerged from coding was used until a theory could be formulated (Merriam, 2009).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) pointed out that theory may be generated initially from the data if it already exists and these theories can be elaborated and modified as incoming data are
meticulously played against them. To identify categories and concepts that emerged from text and link these concepts into substantive and formal theories I started with some general themes derived from reading literature and added more themes and sub-themes as they emerged. Sources that influenced the themes I found included existing literature reviews, professional definitions, my values, prior experiences, and theoretical orientations as a researcher, and the characteristics of the phenomena I was studying, namely grandparents raising grandchildren. I analyzed themes that emerged using a variety of data collection methods. For example, I compared the themes that emerged from my first interview with Party to her second interview and subsequently, I also compared her first interview to Grace’s first interview to investigate how and whether these participants’ socioeconomic, racial, and educational background resulted in same or different themes, and I also explored how these factors influenced their role construction. Additionally I also looked for common threads and connections within and among the data from all my participants (Maxwell, 2005) to help me form a theory regarding their role construction.

**Coding as a means for organizing data.** Managing the data for my study was an arduous process so I employed coding to help organize the data. Coding by using some form of notation (letter, number, or a combination of both) helped me to manage my data so I could easily retrieve them as I analyzed and wrote about my findings. This was especially important because I had multiple transcriptions from each participant, their grandchildren, and the videotaping of the family collage activity. To enable the development of a grounded theory, Corbin and Strauss (2007) and Merriam (2009) suggested three phases of coding: initial or open coding, axial or focus coding, and finally, selective or theoretical coding.

During initial or open coding the researcher proofreads the data line-by-line, underlining key phrases and tagging any unit of data that may be relevant to the study in order to identify
potential themes by pulling together real examples from the text. This identifying of the categories and terms used by participants themselves is called “in vivo” coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 170). The “in vivo” approach helps to keep the researcher close to the data and requires them to be analytical. It “can provide a crucial check on whether the researcher has grasped what is significant” to the participant, and may help “crystallize and condense meanings” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). The researcher reads the text and asks questions to identify codes that are theoretical or analytical and thinks about what the person being interviewed is saying while making a concerted effort to not allow their analysis to be influenced by their preconceived ideas nor will they simply accept the point of view of the interviewee (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). This initial phase encourages researchers to look for processes, actions, assumptions, and consequences in order to create themes that they can tag the data to.

The second phase of coding is axial or focus (Merriam, 2009) coding, a process of connecting categories and properties to each other by refining the category scheme. This type of coding requires researchers to use the most significant codes developed through initial coding to look through bigger chunks of data. They then relate data to data to create new codes and then compare codes to data and codes to codes to refine the categories and formulate links between and among the categories. The third and final phase of coding is selective or theoretical coding whereby researchers check the codes against the text again to see how they can be improved, then they look for relationships between categories and link them with each other and with more general codes so as to move the analysis toward a theoretical direction and ultimately a theory is created. Strauss and Corbin (1998) emphasized that:

Coding procedures which include constant comparison, theoretical questioning,
theoretical sampling, concept development and their relationships help to protect the
researcher from accepting any of those voices on their own terms, and to some extent
forces the researchers’ own voice to be questioning, questioned, and provisional. (p. 172)
Additionally, analyzing and interpreting the meaning of findings within the context of
participants’ words, which Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) refer to as “meaning coding” (p. 197) will
help researchers to focus on the meaning of what is said because meaning and language are
intertwined. Using coding as a means of categorizing data helped me to find connections to
understand the data in context by looking for relationships while keeping an open attitude and
being aware of my subjectivity.

**Memo writing as a tool for successful coding.** Memo writing allows the researcher to
write his or her thoughts and speculations as they analyze data throughout the research process to
conceptualize incidents and record relationships among themes and categories. Memo allows the
researcher to theorize and write down ideas about substantive codes and their theoretically coded
relationships as they emerge during coding, collecting and analyzing data, and during memoing
(Glaser, 1998). It keeps the researcher engaged in the analysis while he or she moves between
the emerging analysis and raw data of interviews, field notes, and documents to discover and
explore ideas. Memos can be described as conversations that the researchers have between
themselves and the data as they engage in the analytic process. They help researchers to polish,
relate, and monitor concepts that emerge as incidents and ideas develop and subsequently they
can use memos to collate these information to form a written theory that is based on rich data.

Charmaz (2006) and Glaser (1998) indicated that memo writing allows the researcher to
make real their thoughts by freely noting them down on paper so that eventually these thoughts
can be shared with others. Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggested that there are three kinds of
memo writing. One is the use of code notes to illustrate that concepts are being discovered; next
is theory notes which are the researcher’s summarized ideas about what is going on in the text; and last is the operational notes to denote practical matters.

**Theoretical sampling, saturation, and sorting.** Memo writing and coding are fundamental tools for constant comparative analysis which is a major characteristic of grounded theory. Apart from constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is the other hallmark of grounded theory to support the systematic discovery of theory from the data in order to ensure that theories remain firmly grounded in the observations and are not based in the abstract. Theoretical sampling refers to the process of choosing new research sites or cases to compare with ones that have already been studied so the sampling of cases, settings or respondents is guided by the need to test the limits of developing explanations that are constantly grounded in the data being analyzed. It can be viewed as a technique of data triangulation because it uses independent pieces of information to elaborate and refine categories (Charmaz, 2006) of what is only partially known or understood in the emerging theory. It may occur at the beginning of the research when tentative categories are initially starting to emerge or at a later stage when the researcher is trying to make links between categories.

Theoretical sampling aims to saturate theoretical categories so researchers will know when a category is saturated because collecting new data does not uncover new properties of theoretical categories. It is used in conjunction with sorting whereby memos are sorted so that relationships between categories can be explored theoretically. The sorting process requires the researcher to piece together fractured data and this may result in the emerging of new ideas which can generate theory to clarify, support, and strengthen the relationships between categories and consequently assist in developing an emergent theory. On a practical note, Ryan and Bernard (2003) encourage the use of visual displays and graphic organizers such as “key quotes, building
matrices or form, laying theories on flowcharts or maps, boxes containing themes, and unidirectional and bidirectional arrows” (p. 282) to enhance the way researchers present and communicate the relationship between categories to others.

**Ensuring Validity and Reliability.**

My data analysis helped me to go beyond the themes, patterns, and categories as I reflected and made sense of my findings by listening to my participants’ voices and explored what it meant to them to be a grandparent raising grandchildren. During the third and last interview, I used the information from the two previous interviews to find out how my participants made sense of their lives as they raise and educate their grandchildren. My data analysis helped me to figure out how grandparents saw themselves as helping teachers and school personnel to be cognizant of the issues faced by them (grandparents). I also explored grandparents’ interpretation of their successes and influence in their grandchild’s school. Additionally, I used member check and triangulation as a means of ensuring validity and reliability in my study.

Glesne (2006) and Merriam (2009) describe member check as the process of taking my data and interpretations back to my participants to check for accuracy and to clarify my interpretations with my participants and if needed, to ask for further explanations. Merriam (2009) describes triangulation as using multiple sources, such as multiple investigators, sources of data, or data collection methods to validate and confirm emerging findings. Maxwell (2005) adds that triangulation is “collecting information using a variety of sources and methods…(so as) to reduce the risk that your conclusions will reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a specific source or method, and allows you to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues you are investigating” (pp. 93-94). An example of this was when I looked at
grandparents’ sense of efficacy through my interviews with grandparents, through the perspectives of their grandchildren as I observed their interactions with each other during the family collage activity and in my conversations with the grandchild, and through my researcher’s field notes taken from the interviews or family collage activity. Additionally, using different methods such as interviews, video-recordings, my researcher’s observational and journaling notes, allowed me to confirm, cross-validate, or corroborate findings thereby offsetting the weakness of one method with the strength of another (Cresswell, 2009).

**Researcher’s Subjectivities, Assumptions, and Biases**

I was aware of and I acknowledge that I brought my own subjectivities, assumptions, and biases into my study. The first comes from my upbringing in Singapore as an Asian Chinese growing up in an environment that is culturally and socially different from that of my North American participants. My perception of grandparents is influenced by how my parents and Asian society view “our elders” – an endearing term that is often used in Asia to respectfully address grandparents. They are the patriarchs and matriarchs of the family and are revered and given the utmost respect, sometimes to an extreme, but nonetheless, grandparents hold a very special place in my country because the oldest holds the most prestigious and honored position in the family.

Not having grown up here, therefore not being grounded in North American culture in the way that my participants are, I was aware that there was a possibility for me to react from my own cultural position and frames of reference, as an Asian immigrant and as a parent, as I listened to my participants’ stories. Hence, I consciously reminded myself that I, along with other researchers “keep their (our) egos in check, realize that we are not the center of the world, and [that interviewing] demands that our actions as interviewers indicate others’ stories are
important and are of worth” (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). With this in mind, I made a concerted effort to be an attentive listener and observer when I interviewed my participants, which included, conscientiously listening without letting my biases get in the way and asking relevant follow-up questions that would reflect my active listening.

Another assumption that I was mindful of was my assumption that all grandparents would have a social network that they could depend on. However, I found this not to be true for many grandparents as I read through literature pertaining to the topic and when I discussed my ideas with Dr. Deborah Whitley (personal communication, July 6, 2011), the director for the National Center for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, a virtual center based at Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia. Additionally, Cox (2008) also found that grandparents who are raising grandchildren often feel “isolated in the community with few or any support to assist them… many struggle to understand the culture to which their grandchildren have assimilated and worry about its impact on them” (p. 475). This is especially true when you consider the two generation gap between grandparents and grandchildren and also that the parents of the other students are often much younger than these grandparents.

Seidman (2006) encouraged researchers to recognize that our understanding of others is limited because we can never totally understand them or their experiences since we are not them and we cannot enter into their stream of consciousness and experience what they have experienced. He suggested that researchers endeavor to listen with empathy and without judgment so that they “can strive to comprehend them (our participants) by understanding their actions” (p. 9). Constant comparative analysis, coding, memo writing, and theoretical sampling, all aspects of grounded theory, helped me to provide a vivid representation of my participants’
voices and their construction of their experience so I could learn from them and better understand the position and experiences of grandparents who are raising grandchildren.
CHAPTER 4
THREE PARTICIPANTS’ NARRATIVES

Dear Readers,

In this chapter I present the narratives of three of my participants, Party, Daisy, and Daisy’s husband, Hoke. I constructed these narratives from the interview transcripts. Each participant’s section starts with a representative and evocative quote that I selected from my interviews with them. These quotes are followed by an introduction to each of the participants and after the introduction come the grandparents’ narratives.

To facilitate smoother transitions in writing and to guide you as the reader I have added my analytic lens. My voice is presented in standard form, while my participants’ voices are in italics and the bolded italics indicate the emphasis in their voices to stress a point. Any words that are in parentheses are meant to clarify a sentence. I urge and hope that you come to the narratives with an open mind. While my voice and thoughts are present throughout the discourse, there is much room left for the reader to interpret. There are many questions that do not have definite answers and there are some passages that may make the reader uncomfortable. Fragments of these narratives presented are grammatically incorrect and I had the opportunity, as architect of this story to display it in a different light, or to withhold information, but I felt that I must stay true to my research. I ask that readers remain open and receptive, ready to give serious thought and contemplation to the grandparents, their voices, and their stories.

As you read the narratives, I invite you to explore the complexity of the phenomenon of grandparents raising grandchildren, appreciating their struggles, challenges, and triumphs as they
share their stories. Furthermore, I invite you to read the narratives with these questions in mind as they were some of the questions guiding my analysis and construction of the narratives: How do the grandparents represent themselves? How do their life experiences influence their parenting approach with their grandchildren? How do they use their funds of knowledge and social network to aid them in raising their grandchildren? What can schools do to support these grandparents and their grandchildren?

Party: A Grandmother’s Story

We got a job! It's more grandparents raising grandchildren today than it ever been in history. And they keep coming and the parents are getting younger, younger, and younger. As they say, you got children raising children now. It is so true. I mean I feel sorry for a lot of the grandchildren because some of the parents is nothing but children now theirselves. Now you know you got children raising children and it's sad. And it's not getting no better (laughs). It's getting worse!

Party (grandmother of four, age 57)

My meeting with Party (self-selected pseudonym) was fortuitous, to say the least. I met Party when she was a guest speaker for a class taught by a social studies professor (Dr. Kimble) whom I had met the week before to discuss my research. Party, 6 feet tall, dressed in an orange pantsuit and brand-new white sneakers, and holding onto a mahogany walking stick, sat quietly, head held high with her back straight against the chair, as Dr. Kimble introduced her. The class of 19 undergraduates comprised of ten Whites, five Blacks, two Hispanics and two Asians sat mesmerized by Party as she spoke about raising her four grandchildren by herself. Her words of
wisdom and her sharing of her life experiences were eye-openers for the young, mostly middle-class students, many of whom probably never experienced even half of the hardships and challenges that this grandmother had faced. Party values education and aspires for her grandchildren to get a college degree or a technical school diploma. Her parting statement to this undergraduate class, *I hope one day to see my grandchildren sitting right where you are,* succinctly illustrated her fervent wish and high expectations for her grandchildren.

Party is a 57 year-old Black single woman who has an 11th grade education. She lives in a rented single-story red brick four bedroom, 3-bathroom house in a subsidized housing subdivision in Clarke County. The red-brick house has a front porch, where a forest green Buick sedan was parked, and a shady oak tree perched right outside the living room window. As you enter the house, you see a maroon floral sofa set, gold-trimmed glass top coffee table, and an entertainment center with a television set and family pictures displayed on the shelves. As she shared about herself, Party proudly brought the photos down to point out the various people in each picture (her parents, cousins, aunts, uncles, and sister-in-law).

Party has a great sense of humor and an example of this is her choice of a pseudonym, “Party.” She said she picked it because *I used to love to party all the time. I bet people will know you’re talking about me when they read this but I don’t care.* She uses this humor in the way she talks to her four grandchildren ages 6 to 13. She speaks to them firmly but kindly and lets them know that she expects each of them to help her around the house. Her chore list, written on a 9x13 inch magnetic whiteboard posted on the refrigerator, specifically stated how and what each grandchild was responsible for each day (sweeping, vacuuming, dusting, and helping her with the cooking).
My visits with this family not only opened my eyes to the struggles they face each day but I also saw how the strength and faith of an individual affected those close to her. Party was very open and forthcoming in her conversations with me and she actively encouraged her grandchildren to share their experiences and feelings with me too. Out of all participants, Party and her four grandchildren were the most excited about my visits. At the end of the third interview they asked me when I would be back again and the kids voiced their disappointment when I said I was done with my interviews. I then told them I would see them at Community Council on Aging (CCA) Christmas party and they perked up. When I did see them in December, all of them were visibly happy to see me again. It was nice to know I was missed.

**Trauma and Challenges: Facing Life’s Curveballs**

Party had suffered several traumas in her own life even before the trauma of her son’s troubles that resulted in her adopting the four grandchildren. Party accepted responsibility for her choices and actions and understood that they are part of her life experiences. They have shaped who she has become. *I had my struggles of hard times... The first integrated school that was tough for me. I mean the 1st day I walked in the classroom the whole class got up and moved to the opposite side of the room and there I was sitting in a row all by myself. I’m stunned, I’m frozen, I’m scared! I didn’t know what to do so I sit there quietly all day and nobody ever spoke to me... Sometime I had to fight my way in school, sometime I had to fight my way out of school. It got better as we went but it was really rough. As a matter of fact my mom and dad just put me there. They didn’t tell me that; I didn’t know nothing about integration. You know what I mean? So they say here go a Black person, carry me to school. Oh no, this is not fixing to work. I was left, I was being picked at. I have been called everything but a child of God. But I prayed on it. I really rebelled. I really did fight, fuss, everything I did because you can only take so much and*
that saved me for a long time. The trauma of being placed in an all white school with little support from home or school when Party was in 5th grade still seemed raw as she shared this experience with me.

Forty-six years later she is still tormented by the memories of being ridiculed and the wound remains open. I don’t even attend the, what you call them umm… graduation parties. I never been to one and my cousins or friends, Black friends they always tell me everybody asking about you, they want to see you. But see, it still flashes back but I just can’t go. But I don’t teach my kids this, you know. It gets better but I really did have a hard time and then I was mean too. I can’t put it all on them, you know, but I went through a struggle, I really did and sometimes it wouldn’t even be them. It’d just be me, you know. I just have flashbacks of the time and I did turn to drugs and stuff like this, you know. But I know better now. I’m not perfect…I was wild, hard-head, you could tell me nothing, but I don’t want to see them (grandchildren) to struggle like I have. Party’s wisdom and years of maturity is evident here as she acknowledged the choices she made and her fervent wish that her grandchildren do not choose the same path but will instead learn from her mistakes.

Sadly, Party has also had to endure the deaths of those close to her, including a brother who was killed in a boating accident, and all three of her fiancés. I have [been engaged] and each boyfriend got killed (murdered - drug related). Three times before I even, I have my rings and everything, I still got them. And each time all three of them got killed before I, I could say I do. So I give up after that. I really did. Additionally, Party also spent time in the state prison and expressed regret for the choices she made. She does not want her grandchildren to follow that route. I’ve been incarcerated for a long period of time. I had a six-year sentence. I got out in four and a half years and, and, uh, that the cycle can be broken. It can, I mean, I’m not saying, you
know, you bring your children up and they still gonna do what they want to, regardless, when they get of age, [as] soon as they get up out under your wings, you know, and they gonna have some bumps and stumps and fall but I hope they don’t follow my footsteps. Lord, have mercy! Party displayed great wisdom as she reflected on her past and talked about how a parent can only do so much, guiding a child because, ultimately, it is each individual’s prerogative to pick her path in life.

As I spent time with Party and her grandchildren I could see that Party is a practical individual with a very strong will and I believe it is this strong will that has helped her to adjust to life and to keep going despite adversities. I’m not perfect. I don’t try to be. I’m just me and there’s me. Anybody [who] knows me will tell you I always worked, always kept me a job, as long as I could work. I strayed away, did a lot of things, and I had to learn some things the hard way, you know what I mean, but still I’ve got, the Lord still blessed me. I got all that behind me. I’m moving on. I’ve adopted my four grandchildren and I do the best I can. That’s all I can do. I don’t try and hide nothing, you know, been in trouble, been in jail, out of jail and I say the cycle needs to break. I don’t want to see any kids go through what I went through or what their parents went through. I’m talking about today, I’m living for tomorrow, and yesterday is gone.

Ghosts (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003) from the past, specifically being ridiculed and ostracized in school and her time in jail, haunt Party. Being incarcerated has left an indelible scar on her life and memory even though it was more than 20 years ago. One can only imagine the horrors of her experience of spending four and a half years in prison and it was possibly quite horrific because images came back to haunt her when she was going through the adoption procedure. Ok, I, I applied in 2007, so it took me one year to adopt them. They come finally in 2008 and then me, I, I like backed out myself. I mean the first court date I didn’t go. I was so
nervous and scared. I had a flashback on when I was incarcerated. When I walked in that courtroom it looked just like (pause) the courthouse in Atlanta and I flew. I run! I hate to go in the courthouse, it just scared me to death to go in the courthouse and I didn’t show up at the first [appointment]. Although I asked, Party was not willing to share about her experiences about being in the courtroom or her time in incarceration. Shaking her head no, she said, “It’s too bad, not good. You don’t want to go there.” I respected her wishes and did not pursue it any further.

How Party Constructed and Viewed Her Role

In the following pages, I use Party’s narratives to illustrate the numerous roles she plays as a daughter, mother, and grandparent, and how she constructs each role and handles the responsibilities through her funds of knowledge. Party shares how she uses her life experiences and extensive social network to obtain the resources and education she feels her grandchildren deserve, by partnering with school personnel and being assertively proactive in her approach. In her own words, if it is out there, Party will find it.

Juggling Her Responsibilities: As a Daughter, Mother, and Grandparent

Party’s life is not unlike living in a triangle, with Party in the middle and the three points of the triangle being her 81-year old dad, her 34-year old son, and her four grandchildren. Her mother passed away two years ago and she now shares the care of her dad, who lives 30 miles from her in Flamingo, Georgia, with her sister. Her son is presently living with his grandfather as he rebuilds his life after completing his jail term last year. Party is often called to help with her father’s care and when she gets that call she just go(es) there to help, drop everything, and go take care of him. Having recently lost her mother in 2009, Party has vowed to take care of her dad and be there for him because that is a promise she made to her mom before she died. She is the one who provides stability to the family and is the go-to person.
In her own words, she stepped up to the plate. The decision to adopt her grandchildren was not an easy one because she is not in good health, she has ailing parent/s, and it has also put a wedge in her relationship with her son and the children’s mother (parents are not married). At first I had guardianship of them and then you know the mom and dad could still come see them if they chose, you know. But right at that time we’re feuding. So after I got guardianship they still didn’t come spend time with them and take time with them, so I just like made up my mind. Lord, let me go and adopt these children because I’m trying to give the mom and dad a chance to get on their feet and get it together so they can get their children. They still didn’t do it, so I said, “Well Lord, it’s left on you and I to get these children.” So I went on and adopted them, but the mom and dad both asked me please not to do it. I said but you know these kids need the stability now. They don’t want to wait till you all make up your mind, made up whether y’all, you know, I do, I don’t. So I said if y’all don’t get it together I’m going to go ahead and adopt them and they still didn’t get it together so I knew then what I had to do. So I went on and adopted them.

Party’s strong sense of efficacy is illustrated here as she evaluated the situation, decided on a strategy, and carried it out, believing that she was doing it in the best interest of her grandchildren, despite the parents’ resistance.

Party is concerned about the role she plays as the facilitator of maintaining the relationship between her grandchildren and their parents and between herself and the parents. She wants to prevent the children’s biggest fear from coming true. They don’t want their dad to go back to jail, they don’t want their mom to go back to jail, you know, they getting older. They’re asking more questions, questions about their mom and dad. That’s the reason I want the mom and dad to see them so they can answer these questions. I can’t answer them, you know what I mean? She wants the parents to build a strong bond with their children and consciously
encourages her son and the children’s mother to be active in their children’s lives. She understands that they were but teenagers themselves when they became parents and that the mother was neglected as a child herself and she did not have good role models for parenting. Party tries to be a good example by modeling how to be proactive, giving the parents opportunities to build memories together with the children by seeking their help for homework and encouraging them to take the children out for family outings.

The dilemma of being in the middle and juggling her role as daughter, mother, and grandmother has taken a toll on her health and well-being. I don’t sleep good. I don’t have good night resting and after the kids go off to school and I’m not needed in Flamingo, I’m back in my bed and I sleep until about 12, you know, uh, a catnap, whatever. And I’m on it again, I’m washing, I’m cooking, I’m running errands. They got to go to the dentist twice a year and get their eye exam once a year. One of them get sick, you know I may end up at the doctors’ office and end up at hospitals all the time. And plus I got my father to help take care of him, so I really got a busy schedule. She has also put off knee and hip replacement surgeries because of her own fear of going under the knife and also because she worries about who would take care of her grandchildren if she does have the surgeries, especially considering that the recovery period is expected to be long and part of that time would render her immobile.

Party’s resilience, faith, and strength to overcome many difficulties and her dedication to her grandchildren, despite the lack of support from her son, are evident in the following narration: Twenty years ago ain’t no way you could have got me to try and raise ‘em. My mom say I ain’t got but one. I got that one out of the way and ain’t fooling no more, no grandchildren, no half grandchildren. I come and get them when I want to and come back, you know. But after I adopt these children I’m telling you, if I had to do it again, I would. My son says I’m bossy. Say I
boss them around. You like to boss, that’s what that is. And then a lot of people say, well, you didn’t have but one. But, but, it’s, it’s been depressing, it’s been a joy, it’s been damn if you do, damn if you don’t. It’s been everything, but if I had to do it again, I would do it because I want to see them happy. Here, she emphasized her primary goal of ensuring her grandchildren’s happiness and helping them build a good future, similar to the aspirations of parents in general.

**Party’s Role as a Grandparent Raising Grandchildren**

The following reflects Party’s tenacity to keep going despite the odds. She is bound and determined to ensure that she takes good care of her grandchildren and unselfishly puts herself last. She takes on the role of monitoring their health, participates in activities at school, provides transportation, cooks, helps with housework, and coordinates family and church social activities. It’s been 34 years since I had to deal with children and I had to give up a lot. I had to become responsible, and I never have a dull moment. And the reason I say that is I’m always have to carry them to dental appointments, eye exams. Diego and Dora got hearing problems. Both of them had tubes in the ears and I got 3 of them are asthmatic - Diego, Dora, and Marilyn. So my hands are full. I mean I got school programs I got to go to, I got, uh, you know, activities. I got to go back to the school, pick these kids up to get them from point A to point B. I do more cooking now than I have ever cooked in my life because I can’t afford to carry all five of us out to eat but maybe once a month. So I’m cooking every day, I’m washing every day, I’m ironing, I’m cleaning every day, I’m doing homework every day, I’m reading every day, uh, you know, we have social activities too. They go out, most of the time, thank the Lord, to Grandparents Raising Grandchildren ’cause they always have something for them. You know family gathering, church gathering. I never have a dull moment. I’m always on the go. Even when I don’t feel like it, I got to go (laughs). If it takes every bone in my body, every breath I take, for them to be happy and
comfortable, I’m willing to do that, just for them, so they don’t have to worry about is the police coming to my house.

Here again we see the ghost of her time in prison coming back. It never seems far from her thoughts and I see the pain in her eyes whenever she mentions anything about her time in prison. *I tell my kids, Granny been in trouble before. The Lord bless me and give me another chance. I don’t want to see y’all go down that road. Your mama and daddy been in trouble before. I don’t want to see y’all follow that footsteps or go down that road. That pattern need to break, you know what I mean. I want to see them prosper and do good and they are...I just give everything up and sit here with them myself and do what need to be done. That way I know what’s going on and I don’t have to worry. I can’t stand to worry.*

I cannot help but have the utmost respect and admiration for Party. She showed more wisdom and strength than many people who have more resources and education than she does. As their primary caregiver, she is humble but secure in her ability to raise her grandchildren and is diligent in ensuring that their basic needs are met. *I always put their needs before their wants ‘cause kids want everything and I believe in getting children what they need and let their wants come later. I always put them first. I put the Lord first and then come these children, and I’m always putting myself on hold for me and anybody else, not only my children, anybody’s children that need helping. Anything I can do I’m gonna try my best to [do so].* Her message was that she is not here to please them but rather to raise them to be responsible and valuable citizens and she extends this goal to other people’s children, that of her nieces, nephews, friends, and neighbors.

Party smiles and jokes with her grandchildren and I observe that they revere and respect her as indicated by their actions and the way they speak to her. They hug and tell her they love her. She is a “warm demander” (Irvine, 2003), kind but firm, and in turn she gives them ten-fold
of what they put into the relationship. *I get their attention, I do discipline my children. I’m not mean to them but I do discipline. I do spank and I have.* The grandchildren recognize the sacrifices she has made for them and they acknowledge, appreciate, and mind her. *They’re the most loving children, they’re most manageable children. Everybody’s talking about how manageable they are.* Party uses her funds of knowledge throughout the day when interacting with her grandchildren. Marilyn (8) talked about how her grandmother helped her with her schoolwork. *She helps me with my math. She helps by a drawing picture to show me an example and then I have to go back there and do it again.* Party uses visual cues and hands-on practical experience to help Marilyn understand her schoolwork.

Dora sits on her grandma’s lap and says *I feel safe and sometimes she helps me with my homework.* Diego (15) proudly boasts about his grandmother’s cooking skills - *When she sees something in the magazine that she knows how to make, she will cook it.* Party proudly announced to me that she *makes everything from scratch and I get the children to help me in the kitchen so they can learn how to cook.* Party’s philosophy of giving the children practical experiences with cooking under her supervision illustrated how she passes her cooking skills to them. I could also imagine her giving instructions, joking with them, listening as they share their stories and worries, giving pep talks about studying hard and behaving well especially in public, much like those my father gave me when I stood beside him, in front of the hot stove, as he showed me how to cook “laksa” (a traditional noodle dish) or at the kitchen sink cleaning a fish. These are the memories that the grandchildren will fondly remember later when they are older, as I remember mine.
Funds of Knowledge: Using Her Life Experiences as Lessons to be Learned

The four and half years that Party spent in jail has impacted her life in many ways. I learn when I was incarcerated stuff like what we sit here talking about, just twenty years ago ain’t no way I would sit down and talk with you openly like I do now. Twenty years ago you couldn’t have got this out of me. But I look at [how] I emerge different today than I did 20 years ago. I mean it probably just has been 7 or 8 years ago I wouldn’t have opened up but I get to thinking and I guess the Lord working with me in a lot of ways. You know, my lifestyle and a lot of things I did, I wasn’t no bad child. I was just mischievous, like to stay dim [dumb] all the time. It thrilled me you know, but I finally took responsibility. That’s the first thing you got to do is take responsibility for your own action. Quit blaming everybody else for something you done did. You know what I mean? And that was my biggest problem - I wasn’t taking responsibility. I was, well, if so-and-so.... No, I got to stop that. I got to stand up, stop, take responsibility for my own action.

Party was determined not only to learn from but also to share her mistakes with others, especially with her grandchildren. The cycle can be broken...I’m glad that I woke up, in time, to step up to the plate and do things. I think I look on my life, if I share it with somebody else, maybe it’ll stop somebody’s child. [It] might not be now one of my four, but it might stop another child from going down the road. It could turn a child that’s out there around and bring him back. She sees no need to sugar-coat her life and wants to tell people like it is. I just down to earth. I open up and I tell people what it's like. It’s hard - I would not tell them no lies. It’s hard because I’m single and I refuse to bring a man in over these children. You got to be careful [with] everything now.
Several times throughout my interviews Party used her funds of knowledge from her own life experiences to reiterate her belief that everyone has choices and it is up to each individual to pick her path in life and to be prepared to be answerable to those choices. *I can do bad by myself. I don’t need help doing that. People got to learn how to take responsibility for, you know what I mean, and I do. I take responsibility for all the wrong-doings in my life. It wasn’t nobody but me. You know I could have said no as well as I said yes. So I tell my grandchildren that you know you don’t have to lie, you don’t have to steal, and you don’t have to do these things you know. It’ll carry you a long way to be honest, truthful, and thankful. It'll carry you a long way.* Party’s advice and words of wisdom are the result of many hours of reflection on her life and her deep faith in her religion.

Party values education and sees it as a ticket to a more promising future. She has an 11th grade education and wants her grandchildren to aspire to higher levels and wants to prepare them for an independent and successful life. *I tell my kids I want you all to finish high school. I would like for them to go further - if not four years of college, five years of college, or just techno school, techno college. I tell them how important it is to have an education. You know you got to even have a high school diploma to just get a fast food job. You know what I mean? You all gonna need this education to live after I’m gone. I want these children be able to stand on their own two feet and not wish and wonder how we going make it and education is the first thing I put.* Her words of wisdom are not lost on her grandchildren and I had the privilege to observe them interact with each other during our Family Collage activity.

Diego is the oldest of the four grandchildren and Party’s only grandson. He is 5 feet 4 inches and is built like a football player. Party laughed and told me that even though he hates it she loves calling him *my little goblin* because his birthday falls on Halloween. Diego has a quiet
disposition and it was endearing to watch how he, a 13-year old bespectacled seventh grader, interacted very respectfully with his grandmother. Diego shared his collage and talked about his dream to get a good education and get a good job so he could take my grandma to Hawaii. Mary, the oldest granddaughter, is a feisty 11-year old. She is tall for her age, almost as tall as Diego, and is in fifth grade. Party described her as the most challenging child, hard-head, won’t listen, almost have to knock her down to her knees sometimes, she’s the one who gets the most spankings but thankfully she is doing well in school after receiving some remedial help from her teachers and support from the school counselor.

During our family collage activity, Marilyn, who is eight years old, cuts out a picture of a college graduate and said she is going to be that girl one day because my grandma wants me to go to college. Marilyn is in third grade, smart as a whip, is the most outgoing child, and she loves to hug. She is the only one who currently does not have a mentor from the local university and is hoping to get one soon. Her big brown eyes and beautiful smile are delightful and she was always the first to open the door and enthusiastically welcomed me each time I visited them. Dora, the youngest, is six years old and is in first grade. She is petite, quiet, seems to be the most reserved, and tends to cling to her grandmother. As I spend time with this family, it was obvious to me that all four grandchildren respect and mind their grandmother and they seemed aware of the sacrifices she is making for them. In a sense they feel responsible for that and they try to make her happy by striving hard to excel in school. They are all making good grades and Party is especially amazed and very proud that Dora is being screened for the gifted program.

Party is a no-nonsense grandma – she expects a lot but she also gives a lot. She shares her funds of knowledge constantly, demands good manners and respect, and wants her grandchildren to learn from her mistakes so that they do not have to take the road she took and suffer the
consequences of unwise choices. Well, I’m constantly on my four grandchildren. I want you all to learn, listen, zip that lip up, open them ears and open your heart. Yes ma’am, thank you, please, yes sir, no sir. It’ll carry you a long way. She encourages them to be attentive, to speak up and seek help when needed, especially when they are in school. Something you don’t understand in your daily activity at school you go raise your hand or you go to your teacher’s desk and tell her, “I don’t understand. Will you please explain this to me?” She models this lesson of seeking help even among themselves at home, using every grandchild’s strength to help another. My four children, if something I don’t understand, then I rely on the other three and all four help each other. I mean Diego, if something I don’t understand, or I’m busy doing something, Diego helps Marilyn, Mary helps Dora, or Marilyn helps Dora. They’ll get in and help each other when it comes to this work and if one is smarter in one subject I put him on.

Getting her grandchildren to help each other not only helps Party to raise them and manage the home, it also builds each child’s confidence and teaches them how to relate and help others. At the same time it also reinforces what they have learned and are learning and makes for good practice. This reminded me of how my father taught my siblings and me to help each other when he could not be home because he was at work.

Party’s conscientiousness and tenacity to do what it takes is evident in the various jobs she has taken over the years in order to provide for her family. She has worked on a chicken farm, in the cotton mills, at Rhoades Carpet Factory, as a welder at Haywood Windows and Doors, and at Caterpillar, and her final and favorite place of employment was at Shalom Nursing Home, where she worked for 15 years before retiring. She said that she has an affinity for children and senior citizens and easily connects with them. This is also reflected in the manner in which she interacts with her grandchildren and when she talked about how she cared for her
mother when she was ill and now her dad. Party also shared that she really enjoyed working in
the nursing home because she could easily talk to and loved spending time with the senior
citizens. With the encouragement of some of her patients, she also ventured into doing some
private home healthcare and she said that was the most fulfilling job she has ever had.

Her resilience and fortitude to keep going despite hardships is inspiring and speaks highly
of the role she constructs for herself. *I try not to let anything get me down. I was really down
when my mama died but I look at it like this - that is a debt we all got to pay. I got to be where I
can count on those kids and you can’t dwell on death ’cause it comes. One taken every day and
there’s one being born every day. I try to think positive. It does hurt. I have my moments… I just
take it one day at a time. I put the Lord first in my life and everything else comes after that. And
everything’s been falling’ in place. Sure I struggle. I have a hard time, but I tried not to let the
kids know and I try to work out the sources you know…I’m trying. I give out but I won’t give up.
This last sentence poignantly illustrates the strength of this grandmother. She does not give up
despite the many trials and tribulations that have come her way. She keeps pushing, one step at a
time, persistent and determined to keep going.

Party’s strong faith in God plays a very significant part in how she conducts herself and
lives her life. *I still, see, I need counseling myself. I still have flashbacks on a lot of things but
instead of me falling to the wayside, I get on my knees and I pray and I ask the Lord to help take
the thing off of me, pains I can’t do nothing about. You see a lot of my strength, I know that’s
right, my strength coming from up above. You know I talk to Him ‘cause I don’t have to worry
about everything I say getting back. Party is very vocal about her faith and trust in God and she
acknowledged her weaknesses and willingly shared this with me and the grandchildren. She
passes on her faith and belief in God to them through the way she lives her life and reinforces the
building of their spiritual growth by taking them to church, bible study, and other church-related events.

**Social Network: Maximizing Her Extensive Social Network**

Party has compassion, not only for her grandchildren but also other people’s children, because she helps anyone who needs help. *If push comes to shove I take ‘em. I got friends that got grandchildren who need help, I will open my door to let them in. Children and elderly people I respect. I’m gonna do all I can to help them… Oh yeah, my door is open, my door is always open to just about anybody any time and anywhere. I’m not stuck on color either, I don’t care. A child is a child and if he needs help, something he needs like clothing, I give him my last. One wonders if her empathy and understanding of others stems from her life experiences.

I venture to say that this may be the case because she has mentioned that being incarcerated gave her time to reflect upon her life and perhaps it also gave her time to see how her choices and decisions impacted her life. It may have also helped her appreciate and have empathy for others without judging them. *I just believe in helping out ‘cause I don’t know whose help I’m gonna need before it’s over with and I figured if I do a good deed and a good job to help somebody, if I need help it’ll come back to me. I truly believe that. And I can’t stand seeing nobody’s children on the street. I’ve seen them get evicted and they have nowhere to go and come here crying. A lot of times I’ve been used, but for a child it’s different story. They come here with [nothing], if I ain’t got two pieces of bread I go hungry before I let that child go hungry. Me and the grandparent go hungry but that child ain’t fixing to go hungry, not with me it ain’t. I give my last. I just can’t help it. The same way about elderly people I can’t, I can’t, I just can’t do it. Party’s willingness to make sacrifices for children, other than her own shows us how she reaches out to others without expecting anything in return. I would venture to say that her
actions and decisions will and probably have impacted her grandchildren as they observe their grandmother help others.

Respect, she demands respect and in turn she gives respect. Party comes across as the matriarchal grandmother that many of us have in our families. She takes this stance with her extended family and even outside her home. *I got nieces and nephews, great nieces and nephews, I’m helping out with them and they just like my grandchildren too. Neighborhood and everybody children flock here. Well, I have some little babies, I call them bay-bies that come down here, and it’s pretty rough sometimes. And I say look, and I have to get rough with some of these kids, and they look at me like, darn! And my grandchildren, they say they won’t come back down here no more ‘cause you mean. I don’t mean to be mean, but I mean business. You not coming down here with this cursing, you not coming down here gonna control and take over my yard, no you not gonna do that. Cause I told them, don’t let me hit them where the good Lord split them, go on home. We’ll holler at you another day when you come back. Some of them I scold them and they’re halfway down the road ‘cause they know I’ll throw something at them* (laughs). Party makes it her business to correct and guide her neighbors’ children and grandchildren, not fearing that her chidings may upset the adults.

Several times she mentioned how we all need to work together to help these young people. This idea reinforced what Ruiz and Zhu (2004) found in their study that Black grandmothers had a rich social network of family and friends. Similar to what Walker’s (1996) work revealed about how historically, Black communities shared child-raising in their neighborhoods, Party uses her funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005) to teach everyone, that she comes into contact with, about the meaning of respect by building respectful
relationships with them so that they, in turn, can sustain and replicate similar relationships (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1978) with others.

Just as the above paragraph illustrated how Party uses the ‘it takes a village’ (Fields-Smith, 2008) philosophy to guide the young ones in her neighborhood, she also enlists the help and advice of others to help raise her four grandchildren. I am responsible [for their learning] with the help of the teachers, my family, my church family, neighbors, and Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Program. You see, I got to give everybody credit, ‘cos it takes all of us. I can’t do it by myself; the teachers can’t do it by theirselves, and most of it start at home. And I thank my mom and dad for my raising, because not only did they help me with my child, they also help with my grandchildren, their great-grandchildren. My sister, my aunts, my uncles, cousins, I mean it takes everybody. My mom’s side of the family have always been the loving, caring family where there’s no little I’s and big you’s and everybody pull together to help each other so that comes from my mom’s side of the family. It really did. DeLong (2006) found that this kind of informal network of support is common among Black grandparents (Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 2005) and this support provides assistance with companionship, chores, and transportation.

Party’s deep appreciation for her immediate and extended family and friends have helped her in her quest to ensure the best care for Diego, Mary, Marilyn and Dora. My mother is just like their mother and she really proud of how they are doing good in school...My mom, dad, and sister was my biggest supporters. My sister is my biggest supporter. She really is. I mean ain’t nothing she won’t do for us. My aunt and uncle, my mom, baby sister, and her husband, they are good supporters to us. She is not afraid or embarrassed to ask for help, and it is because of her willingness to reach out that resulted, for example, in her obtaining a car at a very reasonable price. As far as transportation getting somewhere I got a friend, name’s Suzie. Oh Lord, she be
the one that help me get my car. Party also frequently refers to CCA’s (Community Council on Aging) Grandparents Raising Grandchildren group as a major source of support and great resource for many things related to her and the grandchildren. So there, Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, Oh Lord I don’t know what I’d do without them. Thank God I had a friend been living here in Clarke County a long time and she knew about this organization.

Party is a strong advocate of CCA and one of the biggest impact that this organization had on Party was when they helped her adopt her children. When I asked her to elaborate, Party said that after literally running away from the courthouse at her 1st appointment to adopt her grandchildren, CCA provided transportation and moral support by going with her to the courthouse. Katie, the program director, accompanied Party and helped her throughout the whole adoption process. Party indicated that she was still very nervous and terrified being in the courthouse due to her past experience of being in that same courtroom when she was arrested many years ago, but Katie helped her stand her ground by staying with her until all the paperwork was completed. Even as she spoke about this, I could see her anxiety as she was shaking when she talked about being in court. She emphasized that she never wants to walk into any courtroom any more if she could help it.

If it wasn’t for the other organizations pitching in and helping me I don’t know how we make it each month. Party actively seeks out and takes the initiative to take advantage of the many resources available in the community, such as Meals-on-Wheels, services from the local university (mentoring, food bank) and those from the school system. Additionally she reaches out to individuals like her landlord and the lady down the street, Ms. Cannon. Party told me about an instance when Mary earned a $100 shopping spree opportunity through her school and Party was unable to take her because Marilyn had a temperature. Party sought Ms. Cannon’s help
to drive Mary to Target to use her money as it was only good for that one day. The above example illustrated how Party took the initiative to ensure that the children’s hard work was rewarded. She recognized their potential for excellence and the importance of encouraging the children to do their best in school.

She did this also for Diego when she asked the school counselor if there was any mentoring program he could participate in because she felt it was important for him to have a positive male role model. Party proudly told me that she was so happy when he was selected to be mentored by Alpha Pi, a Black fraternity at the local university. Diego excitedly showed me the list of events and activities (sporting events, social gatherings, team building seminars) he has and will be going to because he is part of this group of twenty middle school boys who have been selected by Alpha Pi. Party’s relentless efforts to provide not only for the basic needs of her grandchildren, but also to meet their mental and emotional needs, demonstrates the funds of knowledge she has about children and about effective ways to support their learning and overall development.

She is especially concerned about the need for her grandchildren to have good male role models. She is happy that her son is now taking a more active role in being a part of the children’s lives. The kids’ dad, now that he’s back home I can call him and he helps the kids now on the phone with their homework. He got his GED [General Education Diploma] now before he went to prison and he way more up to date than I am. And he helps the kids on the phone with homework, on the phone. Her astute observation regarding how children react differently to a man’s voice led her to actively seek the help of significant males to help her grandchildren. My landlord he come in here, he got to fix something, and there’s one whining about this one day and he come in and he say, “Ooh cut out that whine.” A man, men just don’t know what they
missing in a child’s life. Something about that man voice. I got to keep hollering and screaming over and over. My son, he speaks one time, that’s it. My dad used to do that. Mama just fussed, fussed, fussed, [and] fussed. But dad would have [to] speak but one time. Men just don’t know how that is needed when you got children.

Party has hopes of reaching out to the community to impress upon Black males that they are vital for the well-being of their children and the generations to come. They don’t know, and I’m saying men because our Black men, we have lost our Black men. You know what I mean? And you can find them all in the prison system. Not all of them now, but majority of them is in the prison system, and I wish I could go back to the prison system. Maybe some day they might open the door and let me back in there just to talk to them. You see what I’m saying? They’re needed; they are needed for their kids…the Black men that do have these Black children. I wish there was some way possible I can go back to prison system and tell them. I have, I still talk to one of my counselors from prison system. Me and her still talk every once in a while and she said that’s a good idea… I said, I wish I come back, but I say I can’t come back but you [are] there, you work there. You can tell our brothers that, that’s what I tell her. At this point in her life, Party is not emotionally prepared to go back into the prisons, even as a visitor. However, because I believe that her story will touch the lives of many prisoners, especially when they hear about her own experiences as an inmate and then as a grandmother raising grandchildren, I encouraged her to share her story in some form, perhaps in video format. She said it was a good idea and would think about it.

Party also uses her social network to help herself as she recognized the need for her to stay healthy, strong, and mentally able. Similar to the grandparents in DeLong’s (2006) study, Party also relies on and is especially grateful to her church for the help they render. My pastor
and the church, Reverend L. B. Smith, he is very supportive. I mean I can go to him and I can
talk to him about anything. Sometimes I go to talk to my pastor, I talk to Katie (Grandparents
Raising Grandchildren Program Director). I even talk to Ms. Price, she used [to be] over the
mentoring program here. I have talked to her sometimes. I got a cousin, he’s younger than I am.
He got a church here in Tulsa and his name is Kevin Morris. He’s very supportive. I can go to
talk to him. It’s just always somebody you can talk to, you know, in a need of burden down or
just [to take] a break. I am amazed at how insightful she is about her life and how she shares
herself with others, always giving and expecting nothing in return. Party is determined to make
the best of her life and she conveys this message to her grandchildren in the way she lives and
raises them.

**Connecting with the School: Making Herself Known**

Party extends her philosophy of helping others, and at the same time seeking help from
others too, beyond her family and into the school community and she makes herself visibly
present at the schools. *The principal, my kids’ teachers, counselor, Ms. Washburn, even down to
the secretary, everybody knows me* (laughs) *and even up to the bus driver. If we have a problem
they will call me and we’ll get directly to the problem. Even if it’s not a problem, you know,
sometimes they just call me, just talk to me, see how I’m doing and stuff like that. I’m in and out
of the school, I’m going to these schools to check and see. It’s just so much going on and I
popped up over there any time, cos I be sitting there at home saying, Lord these children 3 and 4
years old, what’s going on? They can’t talk for themselves, they can’t tell me, but you know
what? They can, they really can. At that age they can tell you what’s going on. You just have to
sit and listen, you know.* Party stressed the importance of listening and spending time with her
grandchildren. She also highlighted the need to stay informed and be in contact with the school.
Party acknowledged the important role the teachers and school personnel play in helping her raise her four grandchildren and she is very grateful for their help. *I tip my hat to any teacher because they’ve really got their job cut out for them...* Crown, I love that school! The principal, the assistant principal, they got nurses in school, might as well say they got doctors down there. *I mean bus drivers uh...they got two teachers in the room, some of them got three, they got counselors, they got coaches, two and three coaches. I mean, they just got everything you need.* They eating healthier, you know, they got healthier food to eat now than what we did. I don’t see what more, they got computers. Party appreciates the help available in and through the school system. She gave very sound advice when she said *I would advise any parent, you know, to keep in contact with the schools. Let them know [what] you are up against.* She is not afraid to ask for help and wants other grandparents who are raising grandchildren to take advantage of the many resources available to them. Party encourages grandparents to step out of their comfort zone and reach out to the teachers and the school. She stressed that the ultimate goal is to provide the best opportunities for the children to be happy and successful in their lives.

**Voicing Her Expectations**

One of the ways Party positions herself with the school is in her direct approach to discipline. She is confident and assertive in voicing her philosophy and expectations. *I tell the teachers I don’t care how small the problem is, or how big it is, let me know - I would like to know. Don’t keep stuff like that away from me. They got their way of discipline and so have I, but I would like to be informed about anything threatening. It don’t even have to be threatening, I just want to know what’s going on. And then a lot of times, I just appear at school and see for myself. I’m not trying to catch anything, just out of curiosity, I just want to know what a typical day is, how is it going with the kids. So they just like see me walking in any time.* Party is
proactive in learning about what her grandchildren are doing at school and wants the teachers to know that she is interested and determined to play an active role in their learning. *I have called the teacher [and said] look, will you show me how to work this problem ‘cause they doing it different, you know, what I mean. Now show me your way. That’s the way I am. I don’t know what you’re talking about. You got to tell me what you’re talking about.*

Her tenacity to keep pushing and asking can be daunting to some teachers, but on the other hand, teachers can see her as a teaching partner and advocate. Her strong desire to find answers and seek help so she can be of assistance in her grandchildren’s schooling is highly commendable. *Even at my age I can always go to somebody or find something. If I don’t have it here for them children, somebody somewhere here in Clarke County got it for these children, so I always find a way to get them the help they need...Ya, I’m gonna find it. If it can be found, I’ll find it. I pick up this phone and I call everything in Clarke County phone book and I ask questions too. You not ganna find anything sitting hush your mouth* (laughs).

This fierce drive to help the children regardless of any obstacles is illustrated by how Party has managed to get them to their in-school and out-of-school activities (gymnastics, choir, dances, Boys Scout meetings) the past two years without a car. *I mean, even when I didn’t have a car, there’s, it’s always somebody I could pick up that phone and call...You got to get out there. It’s not gonna come to you like that. If it can be found, Party will find it, Granny Party will find it. Her advice to other grandparents is do what you can, when you can, however you can, to keep that child in school, keep them educated. It’s always somebody you can talk to, to help you try to get that child on the right track. It’s somebody out there. I mean you might have to dial every number in the phonebook. If you have to, you can pick up [the phone]. You can even call the police department, fire department, hospitals, anybody. I talk to my kids’ doctors, my landlord,
anybody. She acknowledges the way things are rapidly changing especially, considering the two generation gap between her and her grandchildren. *We lived through the Flintstones and now we got to live through the Jetsons. We flew through that* (laughs). *But there’s not too much more you can do in school now that everything is so modernized.*

The grandchildren have helped her adjust to the technological tools of the day that she is not familiar with. *All four of the kids could do something I can’t do and that’s the computer. I know nothing about no computer. I can’t do no typing… I would like to go back and get my GED, but Lord, I don’t care, what good is it going to do me now? (smiles). I mean just to get it for myself, it’d make me feel good…The kids, we help each other, ‘cause they tell me. Dora’s in 1st grade and she got work I can’t do. She coming home with algebra. I didn’t take algebra till I was about 11th, 12th grade…I tell them, look I don’t want you all to be like Granny. Granny can’t even run a computer just like that, and they say, but we’ll show you. They always willing to help me learn these things too.*

The mutual respect and love that I observed in this family is heartwarming and admirable. I learned how they made the best of what they had and I was also aware of the strong spirit and drive that Party possesses. She passes this determination on to her grandchildren in the hopes that they will learn from her mistakes, avoid the pitfalls of bad choices, and use her wisdom to build a good life for themselves. *I’m just blessed. I thank the Lord for changing my life…the kids turned me around.* What a testimony this is to the children to hear their grandmother say they have changed her life for the better, and in turn, the smile on their faces says it all too because they know they are loved, safe, and secure under their grandmother’s care.
Daisy and Hoke: Parenting for the Second Time Around

Daisy: *I think of myself as a mother again, not a grandparent. It's like they're my kids, they're not my grandchildren. They're my grandkids but they're my kids.*

Hoke: *I have to say I don't see any difference...Yes, ever since they're born, mainly 98% of their lives they have been in our house, so our lives have really not changed, because it was just a continuation from children to grandchildren. And there was never, there was never a break, so I really don't notice a difference.*

Daisy and Hoke (grandparents of 3)

Daisy and Hoke are 65 and 64 years old, respectively, and have been married for 21 years. Theirs is a classic love story that will touch many people because it has only grown stronger despite various challenges and tragedy. Daisy was previously married to an alcoholic for 14 years; she endured violent physical and mental abuse before she left him and remained single for 9 years, vowing never to trust another man. Despite her resistance to commit to their relationship, Hoke relentlessly courted and pursued her for one year, never giving up, and he finally succeeded in convincing Daisy that he was here to stay and would never leave or hurt her. On Larry’s 42nd birthday, January 3, 1989, they were married in a small chapel in Virginia and he adopted her three pre-teen children, Nicole, Sarah, and Ross. The children grew up and had their own families. Nicole had 4 children, but in 2009, she and her 14-year old daughter, Amy, were fatally shot and killed by her 2nd husband because he could not accept that she was planning to divorce him. Daisy and Hoke have permanent custody of Nicole’s three surviving children – Anna (21), Denny (19), and Boolie (16); they had been very active in their care for many years prior when Nicole was in nursing school.
Previously living in Rockdale, Virginia, Daisy and Hoke moved to Georgia in 2001 and they live on a 10-acre lot in Oconee County. They designed their five bedroom, 5-bathroom, single-story house. Daisy, knowing she has diabetes, made it handicap friendly, so the house has extra-wide doors, counters are at wheelchair level, drawers are wider and lowered, cupboards are at a lower level and are equipped with sliding-out shelves, and there is an open space concept throughout the house. Decorations depict great pride in the Black culture with numerous rustic and exquisite figurines, paintings, and photos of their heritage prominently displayed throughout the house.

Daisy is very adept with her fingers and her hobbies include card making, scrap-booking, doll collecting, needlepoint, and making miniature replicas of old-time furniture. In her living room she displayed her masterpiece, a 1-room lighted school house (exact model of her own schoolhouse) with miniature benches, tables, and 1 long blackboard. She has a craft room that is filled and meticulously organized with materials and resources that she uses to create handmade cards that look more professional than the ones sold at the stores. She has over 200 die-cuts and computer programs that she uses to personalize her cards. Within this room, there is a small storage space where she has carefully catalogued construction paper, envelopes, ribbons, and other materials for card-making.

I first met Daisy in 2006 when my family moved to Oconee County after I was offered a teaching position at Oconee Primary School. Daisy was working there and she welcomed me warmly and invited me to bring my children to her house so we could create our own cards, and we did. Daisy is extremely talented and meticulous in anything that she does. As a kindergarten paraprofessional, she would spend hours compiling and decorating memory books for each student. The teacher she worked with told me that Daisy not only spent at least $20 for each
scrapbook, but she also willingly put in many hours to embellish the pages within to personalize them. I have thumbed through these scrapbooks and they are priceless as a keepsake and those students are fortunate to have their memory book so lovingly put together.

Just as in these scrapbooks where she worked very hard to produce a fine handiwork, Daisy does the same in the way she parents and raises her grandchildren. She demands a lot from them, but they do not seem to mind this and seem willing to oblige because they have so much respect and love for their grandparents. This couple’s warm sense of humor and welcoming nature makes me want to spend more time with them and listen to their stories. Laughter and humor ring through the house as they converse and interact with each other and with their grandchildren. They seem like a very happy couple, very giving to each other and to others. They obviously are in sync with each other as reflected by the ease in which they finish each other’s sentences and thoughts.

Daisy worked at Virginia Fried Chicken’s world office as a computer support analyst for twenty-five years before retiring after she had a mini stroke and was advised by her doctor to change her stressful lifestyle. Hoke was a certified math teacher in Virginia for fifteen years before deciding that he could make more money doing other things. He does not seem to mind working two to three jobs and has been doing that for the past twenty years. Currently, he works from 7:30 am till 4:00 pm as part of Oconee County’s maintenance crew and then goes home for dinner, which Daisy lovingly prepares for him each day, and then he leaves to work as a custodian at the local university from 6:00 pm till 2:00 am, comes home to sleep for four hours and is up at 6:00am to begin the same routine again. Hoke said he needs very little sleep. He said he is happy to provide for whatever Daisy needs or wants. He laughed when he said she likes to shop because he explained that, that is an understatement. She is an avid shopper of the Home
Shopping Network and QVC. She tells me she buys most of her stuff from these two shopping sites and takes advantage of their no-interest loans of up one year and proudly added that she always pays her bills off without incurring interest.

Boolie and his sister, Anna, were in and out of the house during my visits as they went about their daily routine and social life. The sibling between them, Denny, is in college up north and they see him during the holidays. Anna is a sophomore at Coral State University and lives in Atlanta, but comes home often. They are confident, respectful, and friendly and I could tell that they are their grandparents’ pride and joy in the way they interact and banter with each other. Boolie was a little more reserved, but he became more talkative when he realized I wasn’t going to make it uncomfortable for him. The children’s needs and wants are met, but they do not seem spoilt and are very appreciative of their grandparents. Boolie was given a brand new Chevrolet black truck for his 16th birthday; they each have a cell phone, laptop, and their own room and bathroom. Boolie is currently the only grandchild still living in the house.

**Trauma and Challenges: The Beginning of a Journey**

The call that changed their lives forever came at 10:30pm on a Sunday night in the summer of 2008 from Daisy’s brother, Colin, a retired police officer. He was notified of the tragedy by one of his police friends who knew that he was related to the victims. Even though reliving those memories was a struggle for Daisy, she persisted because she wanted to tell her story:

*He (Colin) told us that Amy and Nicole were dead and that Boolie had been taken to the hospital but they were pretty sure that he was dead umm...*

Hoke: *She lost it at this point.*

Daisy pauses, breathes, collects herself, and then continues her story.
Yeah, I remember that they had called Sarah (her younger daughter) because it was Sarah who was, who went to the hospital. No, I called Sarah and they went to the hospital to try and find out what was going on and that’s when we found out that Boolie was still alive and was in surgery. And they let her sign all the papers that needed to be signed and then we were trying to find out how we were gonna get to Virginia in a hurry. We had to drive to Birmingham to catch the plane to get there ‘cause we couldn’t afford to go by Delta and the next flight was at Birmingham so we drove to Birmingham. His sister drove us to Birmingham and then we got on the plane and went to Rockdale and then when we got to the hospital. You know they had him all hooked up to all, the everything like that, and he, uh...

Hoke: We couldn’t tell (recognize) him.

Below is an account of what happened with Boolie, his mom, and sister. Although it is lengthy, I feel it is important to include in this paper as it will illustrate the trauma that Boolie endured when he was shot and it will also explain why Daisy is intensely protective of her grandson.

Keith (step-dad) walked into the room and the next thing that Boolie knew the gun was against his head and Keith said something about “I’m gonna show you something that’ll blow you out of this world.” The gun was against Boolie and Boolie looked up like this (looks to the ceiling) so that when the gun went off instead of the bullet going straight across it came in and went down and he said that for a minute he was just like...

Hoke: Stunned.

…and then he heard Amy saying, “Run, Boolie, Run,” and he looked up and Amy was fighting the guy with the gun. Boolie started running down the steps and he said halfway down the steps he heard the gun go off again. He came, he got to the steps, he met Nicole (his mom) in the den
and she said, “Boolie, what happened?” and he said “Granny, I didn’t stop, I just kept running” and he got out the kitchen door and onto the back porch. He heard the gun go off again...He was just running. He said he remembered looking into, across over, the neighbors were out barbecuing in the yard and they had some guests and he started running toward them. And one of the guys, both of them had been in the Marines, and one had been a paramedic in the Marines or something and knew what to do to stop the bleeding. And so that was all that he remembered, ‘cause he passed out. So the next thing that was accounted for, Nicole I think had tried to call 911, and then, because on the 911 call is when they heard him kill himself. But he had shot Amy in the head and he had shot Nicole in the leg and in the back of her head and then he killed himself. Daisy’s recollection of this terrible tragedy was so vivid and real to her because I could tell from the way she stayed focused that she was trying to hold back her emotions just so she could finish telling the story.

Daisy’s impact on her grandchildren’s lives transcends understanding. The power of her voice literally brought Boolie back to life and gave him a reason to live. When I got there I said, “Boolie I’m here,” and the nurses instantly knew that he knew, and that was the first sign of any response that he had given. His heart rate increased, his blood pressure went up too, so they said, “He knows you’re here.” The only time I left his side was to just go out to the funeral home to do the arrangements and to go to the funeral. And other than that, I was with him and we were at the hospital for a month umm... after he knew that I was there he started improving and they said it was just like a miracle. I can only imagine the strength his grandparents gave Boolie as he laid on that hospital bed and endured all the pain and subsequent surgeries to survive the trauma of being shot at and to fathom the murders of his mother and sister.
Because of Boolie’s medical needs and numerous appointments locally and out of town, Daisy chose to resign from her job as a paraprofessional to take care of him. *At first he couldn’t open his mouth at all because the bullet had smashed the jawbone. They had to cut out a piece of his jawbone to make room for him to be able to open his mouth and so he had to go up and make trips to Augusta for follow ups for the next several months away. We went through a tremendous amount and the legal guardianship was so important because Blue Cross Blue Shield paid for everything. Having that insurance through their grandfather has just been a God-given thing for us.* A few years prior to the shooting, Daisy’s daughter, Nicole, who was in nursing school in Maryland, had fortuitously given her parents legal custody of her children so they could be covered by Hoke’s medical insurance while they lived and attended school here. If not for that decision, the astronomical medical bills for Boolie would have been catastrophic for these grandparents.

**How Daisy and Hoke Constructed and Viewed Their Roles**

Daisy and Hoke wear several hats as parents and grandparents. They tell their stories in the ensuing pages, illustrating how they use their funds of knowledge to raise their grandchildren. Daisy’s perspective on relying mainly on her husband and God for support gives the reader a unique look at how these grandparents feel comfortable about self-sufficiently relying on each other to raise and advocate for their grandchildren within the school setting and beyond.

**Juggling Their Responsibilities: As Parents and Grandparents**

Unlike my other participants who mostly took responsibility for their grandchildren later in life, Daisy and Hoke have been actively involved in their grandchildren’s lives since they were babies. The children’s parents could not afford to and were unable to manage a household on
their own, so Daisy and Hoke took over the responsibility and became both the parent and
grandparent to support everyone. Nicole and Gary (Nicole’s first husband and the children’s
father) came and of course they moved in with us, they were living with us. Then he’s out of the
Army and he didn’t have a job and at first she didn’t have a job so we’re umm… the financial
supporters. And then after a while, I guess, Nicole got a job, and, but then she got pregnant
again. We would move them in apartments and out of apartments and you know rented houses,
paying the rent…and they would move in and out, in and out, in and out, and mainly always
depending on us for financial support, because Gary he was just not a worker. He didn’t want to
work. He still doesn’t want to work. Daisy and Hoke gave generously and their daughter, Nicole,
felt secure in their care and she knew that they would do the same for her children.

This couple basically continued to financially and emotionally support their grown
children whilst helping to raise their grandchildren and provided the stability that was needed.
*They would go grocery shopping at our house, you know, and so I always had to keep lots and
lots and lots of food, because she would just come and just fill the paper bags and they would do
grocery shopping at our house and so then she was trying to work part time and go to school.*

Not only did they support their daughter but also her husband, Gary, by paying for him to go to
barber school to get his barber license. But sadly, he was not motivated to be self-sufficient and
never put it to use. Additionally, they also had to help Gary pay for child support for his four
children from his first wife and these children would even come and live with Daisy and Hoke
for a period of time!

Because they were providing for six additional people and sometimes four more children
(Gary’s), Hoke had no choice but to always work two jobs just to pay the bills. This probably
took a toll on him but he always had a positive attitude and would say *you have to do what you*
have to do. Basically they always had a full house because occasionally their other children too
would move in with their families until they managed to get on their own two feet. They always
had an open door policy and willing hearts. *We’ve always just taken care of a lot of people and
we are blessed that we can do just that. Because if you’re not in a position to help other people
that you love, I think that’s a hurtful thing to your heart. So, you know, when you’re in the
position to help and they need help, you help, and it’s a blessing that you’re able to do that.
Some people are not blessed and able to help their kids and their grandkids. We have always
been blessed and I think that’s why we continue to be blessed is because you know we help, we
give, we always give, and we don’t hesitate. You know we never, never hesitate, and I think that’s
one thing that keeps the blessing flowing and keeps us in the position that we are.* Daisy’s and
Hoke’s belief that God will provide as they help others is a testimony to their faith and has
strengthened their bond with their children and grandchildren.

When Daisy and Hoke decided to move to Georgia, Nicole agreed for her children to
move too, so that she could finish nursing school and work. This arrangement was supposed to
be temporary, but it turned out to be for two years and the children were settled and happy here
and did not want to move back to Virginia with their mom. This caused friction between Nicole
and her parents. *She (Nicole) was trying to get the kids to come back and she’s like, I want my
kids, I want my kids. And I’m like, you know, they don’t wanna be there and they’re not coming.
I’m like, you’re gonna have to take me to court. So she called and talked to them at the court
here and they even sent her the papers, they sent her the papers* but she never sent them back. A
couple of months later Nicole called her mom and had a long chat and admitted that she was
wrong to fight with her parents and to insist that the children move back with her. She realized
that she could not afford to support them on her own nor give them the time and attention that
they needed. *Nicole always felt stable with us because that had just been normal, so we were always the financial givers and looking after them (grandchildren) just like they were our kids.* Daisy was grateful that Nicole finally realized it was better for her children to stay in Georgia with their grandparents because they felt secure and stable, hence the decision was made for the good of the children.

**Daisy’s and Hoke’s Roles as Grandparents Raising Grandchildren**

As stated earlier, Hoke and Daisy were already actively participating in the raising of Nicole’s children since they were babies because they were either paying for their rent and/or having them live in their house to enable Nicole to successfully complete nursing school. This helped Nicole tremendously because she did not have to work as her parents supported them financially so that she could focus on her studies. This was the beginning of Hoke’s and Daisy’s role of being the children’s primary caregivers. *She (Nicole) will be off going to school and going to the hospital and I was like their mom.* Then when Daisy and Hoke decided to move to Georgia in 2000, Nicole gave her parents legal guardianship of her children. Their dad (Gary) gave up his parental rights because *he didn’t want them. He never wanted them. He never wanted the responsibilities of taking care of them.* As sad as this may sound, in hindsight it was the best thing to happen because when the murders occurred, Hoke and Daisy already had parental rights to the children and could authorize medical care for Boolie without any delay or questions about their legal status.

Presuming that their grandchildren would be with them of an extended period of time, Daisy and Hoke designed and built their house with enough bedrooms for everyone and took over full responsibility for their grandchildren. After Nicole started working and was more settled she got the children to move back with her. They did so for two years but it was not a
good situation because they were basically taking care of themselves and were left to fend for themselves, with some long distance help from Daisy. When they went back with their mom we did homework over the phone every day. I called them every morning to make sure they’re up and getting ready to go to school and then their mom worked at night so I was on the phone with them until they went to bed, you know, doing homework and all. The year they’re staying with her they were fighting and fighting, you know brothers and sisters fighting, and they would call me every day. They were fighting and fighting and I’m trying to calm them down over the phone, and you know, what can I do? But I was on the phone with them every day you know for the bad stuff when they were fighting. I did homework with them over the phone every day. I helped them with their homework, made sure they had what they needed and everything. This long distance care-giving situation continued for two years. In between, during all the holidays and school vacations, Hoke and Daisy would pick up their grandchildren and bring them back to their house in Georgia. They consistently played a major role in the children’s lives and from their calculations the children have lived with them more in their lives than they have lived without them.

Today Hoke and Daisy devote their time and attention to Boolie, the only grandchild still living with them, but they continue to stay in close contact with Boolie’s two older siblings, Anna and Denny. They are happy to provide the children with the resources and skills they need to be prepared and successful in school. I had already bought them each their computer, so they knew how to do Microsoft Word, you know, they knew how to do Power Point presentations. They always, and all their projects, they always excelled, because I’ve always given them the tools that they need to work with, to learn with, to be able to expand and grow. If there’s something that they need for school they got it. Anna, Denny, and Boolie fully utilized their
grandparents’ help and skills and they make a concerted effort to keep them informed of their lives.

For example, Anna, who lives in Atlanta and is in college, calls her grandmother 10 times a day every day, and Daisy was visibly pleased about this because it shows how close they are to her. Anna calls me when she gets up, so she calls me when she gets ready to leave for school, she calls me when she gets to school, she calls me on her break, between her classes, she calls me when she gets ready to come home from school, from school she tells me when she gets to her apartment. This is every day, she calls me when she finishes doing her homework, and is getting ready to go to bed, and then it starts all over again (laughs) and these calls that she’s calling me, “Ok, Granny, I need you to pay my EMC card, I need you to do this, I need you to do that, can you go put money in my Sun Trust?” So basically Daisy is busy all day running errands for her grandchildren or dropping by the school if Boolie called her and needed her help.

Daisy is particularly concerned about Boolie’s well-being because of the trauma he went through when he was shot by his step-dad. I am very, very protective of him because I don’t know what it’s like to be shot in the head and survive. I don’t know the things that go through his mind and I will never, as long as I have strength, let anybody do anything that will cause so much trauma that I can prevent. Don’t back him into a corner, because for a time Boolie would, when he got upset about something, he would go in his closet and close the door and sit in there in the dark with something over his head. And it took a long time for him to get over that. I remember one night there was a loud bang in the house and he was asleep and the next thing I knew he was calling me from outside on his cell phone. He had gone out his window because he thought it was a gun shot and he was running. He was 12 when this happened and for a long time he would always come and get in the bed with me and Hoke you know and he is still [scared
off thunder and lightning with the loud noise, he is terrified, he is terrified. Hoke added that it took a lot out of him. Understandably so, even after four years, I observed that the memory of being shot and the tragedy of losing his mother and sister still haunted Boolie. During our interview, as his grandmother was sharing about the shooting, Boolie quietly shut the door to his bedroom. Hoke explained that Boolie found it difficult to listen and re-live the trauma.

Apart from being protectors, Daisy and Hoke also act as mediators and peace-makers among their grandchildren and between the grandchildren and their peers. Hoke shared an incident about Denny when he was in high school and how all of a sudden I knew that the boy was supposed to be coming after Denny with a gun so we had to get in. I work with his dad. I cooled out with that one. So I had to cool down a couple of incidents like that. With his calm disposition and quiet demeanor, Hoke was able to resolve the misunderstanding amicably. Because from early on they had established a trusting relationship with their grandchildren, Hoke and Daisy were able to intervene in a situation before it got ugly simply because Denny talked to them about it.

Daisy and Hoke both agreed that it was important to listen and always keep the communication lines open, and talk to the grandchildren. When I asked them what advice they would give other grandparents who are raising grandchildren, Hoke said, I think communicating with them and talking with them on a day-to-day basis to find our how they’re doing, what they doing, what they doing about the problems they have. I think that’s about the best you can do for them and… listen. It might not be what you want to hear but you should listen. These wise words have tremendously helped to build the trust between Hoke, Daisy, and their grandchildren and this bond was evident in the way they interacted with each other. Perhaps Boolie’s own words summarized the close relationship he has with his grandparents when he said I know that if I do
have a problem I can talk to them about it...They’re just as good as any regular parent. What a testimony it is to his grandparents to hear him say that and from the looks on their faces, I could tell they were touched by his statement.

These grandparents have made a concerted effort from day one to build a close relationship with their grandchildren. Daisy happily shared about how ever since they’re born, I remember when Anna was a baby she and me would have bed snacks in my bed. I would get those crackers and baloney and the circus peanuts. The kids came and the bed is their gathering place in our room and even now when Anna comes with her friends they’re in our bed watching TV. Such efforts to build memories with their grandchildren will be what they will remember in years to come. Hoke and Daisy provided ample opportunities to build a happy life for their young ones. Daisy reminisced about how the kids would pack some snacks and put them on their little red wagon and together with their grandparents they would walk on their 10-acre lot, pretending to be cowboys herding “sheep” (their three dogs) and they would play outside all day and would not return till it got dark.

I am astounded at the boundless energy that both Hoke and Daisy have. They seem to effortlessly carry this energy into the way they raise the grandchildren. Their love for their grandchildren is unconditional and bottomless and they encourage them to reach for the stars. I have tried to, whatever their dreams and aspirations are, I have always tried to let them know that I’m here in total support, you know. And it might be spoiling them but if they say I want this, you know whatever I have to sacrifice, they’re gonna have it. That’s just the way it is. Daisy and Hoke have always been the major parents in the grandchildren’s lives so home is still where we are, always has been where we are, so they still have that because we are here. Through their parenting efforts, these grandparents have instilled in their grandchildren the values that they
need to have, and they trust them to keep those values, hold up to them, and do what they are
supposed to do, as well as have good judgment and take the initiative to set their own
expectations.

The aspirations they have for their grandchildren are no different from those of parents.
They have high expectations for them but they also guide and give them tools to negotiate the
rough terrains in life. The two-generation gap between Daisy and Hoke and their grandchildren
is not a deterrent to them and they have proven that this relationship works. I liked the way
Boolie phrased it: *Well, they’re old-fashioned and they’re going to do things differently from
your parents, but they’re gonna know more. It might be different, but it’s more, they’re wiser.*
They are old, so some of the things they might say you might not understand, but you know they
have a meaning [even if] they do things a different way. From this grandson’s perspective, being
raised by his grandparents is just as good, if not better, than being raised by his parents, because
they are able to provide him the stability and security that his parents could not. Considering the
trauma and numerous surgeries Boolie has experienced, it is of little wonder that his
grandparents think it is a miracle that he is alive and doing so well. *Yes, Boolie is awesome! I’m,
I’m just in awe of him because he is so level-headed and so he is just so spot-on. He just amazes
me and I just think he’s the best!*

_Hoke: That means we did something right_ (laughs).

There is a reason why Boolie is here despite everything. He is visibly grateful for his
grandparents. With a lot of conviction and heartfelt gratitude, Boolie shared the following
sentiment - *If they (his grandparents) weren’t here who knows where I’ll be after that whole
situation* (of being shot in the head by his step-dad). *That’s one of the reasons sometimes after
that people think a kid will go crazy after that and I might have anger issues but it would be
worse if I didn’t have my grandparents because things would be different you know ‘cause it’s not like some kids they withdraw from everybody and it’s ‘cause I even look at myself and ask how am I not like the crazy psycho kid. It’s because I have my grandparents. That’s really why.

They have been there [for me]. Obviously, Daisy and Hoke have and are still playing an indispensable role in Boolie’s life. They are devoted to helping him and his siblings to be the best that they can be. Being grandparents raising grandchildren is a blessing to them, as much as they have been a blessing to their grandchildren.

Funds of Knowledge: Passing Personal Values to Their Grandchildren

Daisy comes across as a very sharp and articulate woman. She is aware of and is rightly very proud of her intelligence and feels it runs in her family. My parents, my upbringing contributes to my strength. Whatever, you do the best you can. There are just no dummies in our family. That just doesn’t happen. She related a scenario that not only reflected her academic prowess but also her delightful humor in the following story: I remember when I was in tenth grade I sat here, and Cassius Clay, Mohammed Ali, sat there (points to the chair beside her). And he would always say after every test in a deep voice, “Mr. Anthony, Mr. Anthony, how come I got an F and she got an A? I got the same thing on my paper that she’s done on hers.” Because he would copy off my paper but he wouldn’t copy right (laughs)! Years and years and years after that, when he was famous for boxing, we would still laugh about that in Rockdale and even once in Chicago he’d go, “That’s that Daisy girl. She makes her papers so hard you can’t even copy” (laughs really hard)! Daisy’s unassuming personality, sense of humor, and humility carries through in the way she lives her life. She uses these traits in her interactions with her grandchildren and I observed that both Boolie and Anna favor her and appreciate her wittiness.
Education is highly valued by Daisy and Hoke and they have very high expectations for their grandchildren. *In our family it’s always a thing that you know, you need an education. You do the best that you can do, so that’s the same attitude that I try to instill in my grandkids... about going to school and doing our best and getting the best grades that could made a big difference in their college life.* One of the funds of knowledge that both Daisy and Hoke have passed on to their grandchildren is the practice of self-discipline. Daisy related how the children’s mother, Nicole, was extremely bright and capable of excelling in school and would sequester herself when it was time to study so that she could really focus on the task at hand. *Even Denny, who’s in Maryland Commons, whenever you talk to him, he’s at the library. He’s constantly studying, like I’m talking to him yesterday and he said, “Well Granny, I’m in the Nicole mode”* (which translated to him being in a very focused mode like his mother used to be in when she was studying to be a nurse).

Daisy gave another example of this self-discipline when she shared about how Anna would not do anything until all of her schoolwork is done and she is satisfied that she has read those chapters and outlined those chapters and got ready for that test or whatever, because she puts her schoolwork before everything else. Today, all three of the grandchildren seem to have taken up that trait and are learning about the value of self-discipline from their grandparents. Hoke referred to this self-discipline as *good grandmother love* and has emphasized to his grandchildren the importance of staying focused to achieve their dreams. *I told them you have to, I don’t care who your friends are, you have to set yourself, set your goals up first.* The three grandchildren have listened and are heeding his advice as they are well-rounded students who excel academically and are active in extra-curricular activities in their respective school and colleges.
Having good morals and respecting oneself and others are character traits that this couple worked to instill in their grandchildren. *I have raised them on the way that I was brought up and the lessons that I learned. I guess I’m trying to pass it on to them and at least give them all those values. I think that I have very good moral values and I try to instill these in them while I teach them to respect other people. First respect yourself and then respect other people.* They also want the children to be able to use sound judgment and Daisy related how she learned to do this by watching her sisters. *I didn’t do anything bad to get punished because I could see my two older sisters. I saw them beaten till they got blue. I didn’t want that. I knew what to do...I had fear.* She learned through her sisters what not to do in order to avoid unpleasant consequences.

Another life skill that they feel is important to teach their grandchildren is conflict resolution but they differ in their approach. Hoke believes in talking to people. *If you think your kid is having a problem with somebody or if you have a problem, go to that person and talk to them. We had to do that two or three different times. I don’t play that. You have to talk about the problem before you get into it. We all know each other, just try to live on this earth. You need to do that.* Daisy teaches them to *not to let anybody jerk you around.* She wants them to stand up for themselves even if it means a physical fight. *Keep your lips closed, keep your hands to yourself and if somebody hits, you better knock them down* (laughs).

Hoke begged to differ when he responded to her input and said, *that’s the normal reaction that people have.* *I worked in Central State (mental hospital) for a number of years...so I know exactly how it is. If you’re out of control, you’re out of control. You do not have to pass the first blow and that’s why I say you have to talk.* He then went on to explain why physical contact is not the ideal solution based on what he experienced growing up. *My father would walk*
in the house and he would take his belt off and do me and I know what beatings are, but there has to be another way. I mean you have to be able to talk to them. If we can’t talk to them, and all we can do is beat them, you just treating them like animals. That’s the way animals do, that’s animal nature. Hoke felt there is a more effective way to discipline and to teach self-control and was insightful about his philosophy with regard to discipline.

Hoke believes in using other strategies that do not encourage physical contact, such as, taking the attention away and separating the parties involved by deflecting the attention away from each other. If you’re gonna fight you got to have an audience. So take the audience away from them and they won’t fight any. Bill Cosby would talk himself out of a situation and sit down with that person, calm them down, sit for a while and then wait and let them express himself so they can talk. You listen and then you give a response. I’ve always been that way. I hate to discipline. First of all I always get them out of the situation…I take them off the property. Strong willed people, you got to separate the strong will. You first got to do that. All of them are going to be right, nobody’s gonna be wrong. The first thing I got to do is get them out of here. I do that. I talk to one, bring them back here and I take another one away cos you got to do that. To me that’s the proper way to do it. Even though Daisy had a different opinion, she stated that Hoke has always been the buffer between her and the kids and she conceded that Hoke’s method of discipline was far more effective and so this is the method Hoke and Daisy use as they raise their grandchildren.

During my interview with Boolie, he shared about having disagreements with his peers and that his grandmother’s advice was to not take any wooden nickels. I had never heard this phrase before so Daisy explained it. Don’t take any wooden nickels means don’t let anybody put you in a position that’s going to get you off track or get you in a position where you don’t need
to be. Don’t let anybody jerk you around. Don’t let anybody push your buttons. Don’t take any wooden nickels because people are always out there trying to hand out wooden nickels and that’s to keep you from your goals, that’s to keep you down, because some people the only way they can be up is by pushing other people down.

Hoke had this advice for Boolie regarding peer relations and disagreements. The first thing is you need to think about it first. And that’s all, we have to express ourselves. He may be a big dummy to tell you the truth. That’s all he’s ever done. He’s always been the bully on the hill and he’s always had brothers and sisters around him so you have to take him out of the situation. Sometimes you can’t, you have to fight; sometimes you don’t, you have to choose. And if you can get out, avoid the situation, avoid it. You don’t need that. It’s not going do anything to help you at all. It doesn’t prove a thing. Most of the time the parties get hurt anyway, both parties get hurt. Hoke’s advice reiterated what Daisy was referring to as not taking any wooden nickels, where one needs to be picky and discerning and he reinforced the practice of making good choices.

Communicating with their grandchildren is very important to Daisy and Hoke especially since there is a two-generation gap between them and their grandchildren. This couple feels that you can avoid a generation gap as long as you have clear and open communication. There’s no gap, so that’s the main thing, you have to communicate with your grandkids. Be open and give them the affirmation that you’re on their side, you are going to back them up, that you are going to stand up with them, that they’re not alone you know. That even though they don’t have their mom and dad that they’ve got me and Papa and we’re just as strong of a force or an influence as their parents would have been in their lives. And they know that, and they have the security, so I think that grandparents need to know to convey that [message] so that child has that security.
They have that safe place, they have that understanding place where they can come to them with any problems or any positive thing that’s happening and there’s going to be an attitude of open communication about it. Their ability to actively listen with an open mind helps them to know what is going on in the grandchildren’s lives and in turn it helps the grandchildren to feel safe to come and talk with them.

Boolie related how his grandparents helped him recently, when he had an altercation with a fellow student at school, about how to handle the situation maturely. She (Granny) tells me just to act like they’re not there. Papa said, he’s always like, come talk to me so I come and talk to him. And usually if I do have a problem, he talks to me about it and helps me to get a handle on things. According to Boolie, this was one way his grandparents have helped him and it is not just altercations but with other stuff too. Daisy told me that Boolie has had trouble with anger management and they have been advised by his therapist that this is to be expected considering the trauma he has experienced from being shot. Boolie’s grandparents accept it as part of his recovery and they do whatever they can to support him especially when he is going through a difficult period.

Boolie gave an example of how his grandparents practiced what they preached when he talked about his grandfather. Papa does some stuff, like he’s always doing something, he’s always telling me, always find something you want to do. And like, I’m wondering, why you’re always outside. He always tells me how it is different. He doesn’t work, he doesn’t work hard, he works smart. That’s what he say, don’t work hard, work smart. So they do different things. Boolie understood and acknowledged that his grandfather has a different way of thinking but he also deeply values it. They have inspired him to go beyond and to dream big. He displayed maturity beyond his age when he said, you’ve got to find something to make your life
extraordinary, make it bigger. Boolie wanted to convey this message to his peers, and Daisy added to it by saying that they should not be too content but to keep trying, reach out, and try to grow. The sky’s the limit and how far an individual goes is only limited by his own thinking.

Hoke added that one of the lessons he wants to pass on to his grandchildren is to have a good work ethic. When I was growing up I was always taught chores around the house had to be done. You shouldn’t do something because somebody asked you to do it but because you want to do it. He believes that taking the initiative to be proactive is a good character trait and he encourages this with all of his grandchildren. As each one grew of age, they were given certain chores to complete around the house. Now that Boolie is the only grandchild staying at home, he has picked up the role of cleaning the kitchen and bathrooms, sweeping, mopping, and doing the dishes without being asked. Daisy is especially proud of the way Boolie has shown such maturity and responsibility whilst excelling in school and on the football field.

Daisy and Hoke also believe that this work ethic, having good morals and the mindset of taking the initiative, having a good attitude, and working smart begins at a very young age and is influenced by one’s upbringing. They cited some of Anna’s friends as not having that solid foundation from home to carry them through the years. If you don’t get that home training, if you don’t get that stable home life, I just think that whatever your friends say it’s only gonna carry you so far. Daisy talked about how out of the five girls that Anna has been friends with since they were in fifth grade, all of them except Anna, have dropped out of college because they got pregnant or were not motivated to continue. I think it’s because of what they did not get at home, because they all had the same exposure at school but I think it was what they did not get at home and these were all [raised by] parents. Anna was the only one who’s living with grandparents. The other girls were living with their parents and even though they are still friends now they’re
not, it’s not like it was. It’s like they’re like spreading apart…their goals are very different… it’s not even the material stuff and opportunities. One of the girls’ parents is one of the most affluent families in Oconee County and she was the first one when she turned 16, she got a brand-new car. They had a big fancy house but the stability of the family life is so shaky that she just got nothing, she got nothing! Hoke emphasized that those values have got to be instilled in you from infancy over time. They both feel blessed that they have been fortunate enough to be available for their grandchildren to be able to ensure that they’re secure and stable from the time that they were born. This security has played a vital role in helping Boolie to trust that his grandparents will always be here for him 100%. Daisy believed that this was part of the reason he pulled through the initial injuries of being shot in the head and the subsequent surgeries that followed.

Social Network: Daisy’s Perspective

Daisy and Hoke acknowledged that they grew up in a different era, one where everyone looked out for each other’s children. If we got in trouble, if anybody in my family got in trouble at school, on the way to school, or from school, and somebody, the neighbor going down the road had to say something, honey, the next day you were gonna get it from your mama (laughs) because it takes a village and everybody looked out for all the kids. And when you did something wrong it was like the whole neighborhood was trying to get you back on the right track, to keep you on the right track. And it wasn’t somebody meddling or being nosy, it was that the parents were united, the community was united. Here you don’t even have a community anymore. There’s just people, there’s just... people, I guess trying to struggle, trying to make their own way, trying to get by and who’s looking out for the kids? Nobody! (Sigh)... ah don’t get me started (laughs). Here Daisy reminisced about how things have changed so drastically that the notion of ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ is almost non-existent. It seem like she is resigned to
this development and has almost built a cocoon around her house, perhaps as a way of protecting her family from any harm.

Although she comes from a family of 10 children, and her husband has 2 siblings, both Daisy and Hoke surprisingly do not consider their siblings as part of their support system. They seem contented to be each other’s support system. *Who helps me is... God and... Hoke and...as far as me helping anybody else in the neighborhood I guess nobody* (laughs). When asked about her social network Daisy said she did not have one. From my conversations with Daisy, I also knew that she occasionally goes to church and Bible study on Thursdays. In addition, she also meets some friends once a month for a meal. These are the teachers and parents she had worked with when she was a paraprofessional at the primary school.

I was puzzled at her answer and wanted to understand how she would define social network. Daisy said *social network is people outside of the home that you’re close with, that you confide in, and talk over things with and you know interact with. I don’t have that...I get my emotional support from God and Hoke and I don’t feel like I’m lacking, don’t even feel like I need to do a research or look anywhere else. I have a rich and full life. It’s wonderful.* Daisy’s statement here indicates a strong two-person, two-parent team and they do not seem to have a need for an extended social network. Both are however, very active in providing support to their children and grandchildren.

The following excerpt from my interview shows the reader the strength of the bond within this two-person connection. *You know what, I love Hoke very, very dearly. I don’t think anybody could love anybody the way Hoke loves me. I’m crazy, I am a wacko, there is nobody (laughs), nobody, and as much as I love him, and I love him so much, you know, the love that he has for me is just unsurpassable...I have been able to do all the things that I do because of Hoke.*
The thing that I appreciate about him so much, is no matter what I do, or no matter what I say I’m gonna do, he’s always very supportive. You know, he may not want to be involved in it, but he is always very supportive of me. I’m gonna be with Hoke and Hoke is always gonna take care of me. I don’t have to be afraid. Hoke’s love for Daisy and her reciprocal feelings for him creates a strong foundation for the entire family. There is a strong two-person, two-parent team, and they do not seem to have a need for an extended social network.

This partnership has created a strong home base and foundation for their grandchildren and their friends. Because this being a small community and we have a name, Holden, we’re pretty much, everybody pretty much knows that we raise our grandchildren. And so, I mean, it’s just as long as there’s the old folks around, everybody knows that we came here with our grandchildren and it’s always been a positive thing, you know, with all the parents and their friends. This has always been a place where they came to hang out, and the parents always were real positive and in favor of it because they just felt like that, that, was a good thing. Daisy went on to illustrate why her house was a safe haven for the children and their peers. When Anna was in high school and her friends would come here and they would always see the way, you know, I would help with homework when they ask me, make sure they had everything to do their work, and I was always interested in what’s next, what [are] you going to do. Daisy’s shared her keen interest in her grandchildren’s lives and schooling with her granddaughter’s friends. For some of these young people, this was the first time someone has done that for them. Daisy made an impact on their lives.

Connecting with the School: Asking for a Proactive Approach

Daisy and Hoke have strong opinions about how parents should monitor and train their children but also about how schools should do their part. My very basic foundation in the
education was superb because they taught real grammar. They don’t teach grammar in school any more. They don’t teach the proper parts of speech, they don’t know the participles and the past participle, and you don’t know what is an adjective and an adverb and I did. I was taught that in school and I think that, notwithstanding that I had the level of intelligence that I did, I think that what they taught in school then compared to what they teach in school now, there’s just no, no comparison. The things that they taught were important in school back then, they don’t think that now. And I guess now they say they’re trying to do the discipline thing and I guess that’s part of the problem for the parents because if you had the discipline at home you wouldn’t have to worry about the discipline at school. Again here, she referred to the need for parents to closely monitor, discipline, communicate, and connect with their children so that they are well-informed about the children’s concerns, activities, and friends.

Asked about what she thought schools could do to help grandparents who are raising grandchildren, Daisy suggested the need for schools to reach out to grandparents. Let’s find out mainly what the situation is a little bit more. Maybe the school system needs to be more proactive because if a grandmother, maybe an older person, is all of a sudden thrust into the position of having to raise [her grandchildren], first of all, she’s gonna be so overwhelmed that she’s not gonna know what to do. So maybe if the school system could be a little more proactive, because after all it’s for the child, that you want to find out how both entities can best help the child or the children ... just communication all around. It’s just so important. Teachers and school personnel should initiate contact with these grandparents and perhaps provide them with information about the resources that are available to them.

Empowering grandparents with the knowledge that they are valuable assets to the school will encourage them to get involved in their grandchild’s schooling and learning. A simple
gesture, such as, highlighting a student’s registration form and noting that s/he is being raised by a grandparent and providing a liaison for that family, someone that the grandparent can call and talk to, without having to explain the situation repeatedly, can be an effective first step to involving grandparents and making them feel welcome. Additionally, teachers need to be sensitive to the child who is being raised by grandparents. Boolie summed it up when he said I wouldn’t want them (teachers) to treat me differently than any other family. This may not be the case for other grandchildren, because in my study, I found that the younger grandchildren wanted their teachers to know of their situation because they enjoyed the extra attention.

**Taking a Stance**

Daisy used authoring, what Barton et al. (2004) described as a way to create our own ways of supporting our children’s learning and schooling with help from others and by utilizing available tools and resources, to help Boolie with his school work. Daisy authored herself as a partner in her grandson’s education, eliciting the help of the administrator when she went to the school and talked to Mrs. Kane, the principal and I told her, I said, “He’s (Boolie) telling me that he’s not going to do his assignment and it’s gonna have a major effect on his grades. He hates Social Studies, he hates the teacher, and I said so you know, I need help.” The principal said that was the first she ever had a parent come into the school and say, I’m here asking you to back me up ‘cause he’s gonna do this and turn it in on time. After this meeting, the principal called Boolie out from his class and allowed him to leave school early so he could go with his grandmother to get the supplies he needed to complete this project. I told him, “If you have to stay up all night you are going to be up all night because before you go to school tomorrow the project is gonna be finished.” And it was and he got an A!
Daisy shared about how she took a stance, sought assistance as a partner in her grandson’s education, made her intentions known to the principal and her grandson, and accomplished her goal of teaching Boolie how to be responsible for his academic work.

Grandparents need to be keenly seeking and aware of what help [is available] and not be prideful because you need help. You need help sometimes. [There is no need] to be prideful so go and ask the school system even, you know, approach the principal. Daisy was proactive and took the initiative to engage in a very personal way in her grandson’s education by authoring a space within the school where she could seek tailored support to help Boolie.

In the next example, Daisy practiced positioning, an approach described by Barton et al. (2004) in their study with Latino immigrant parents that illustrates how parents negotiated ways in newly created interactional spaces at school to influence school personnel. Daisy related an incident when Boolie had lost his shirt after gym class and only had a hoodie (hooded jacket) on when he got to his next class. That teacher told him to take the hoodie off and would not allow Boolie to go to the nurse to get a shirt. Daisy had gone to the school because Boolie had called her to let her know he had just walked out of a classroom as he was having trouble communicating with his teacher. I get to the office and I go to the assistant principal’s office, Dr. Thomas, and... here comes the teacher saying this, that, and that and the other, you know, and he’s like you know why Boolie’s out of class? I said because he’s not gonna be disrespectful to a teacher. He has done exactly as I had taught him. I have told you all at that first meeting with the counselors when he first got to the high school... don’t mess with my grandson, you don’t do it. I won’t let it happen. [Then] Dr. Thomas says, “Well, you know he’s got that cell phone.” I said, “Yes.” “You know kids can’t have cell phones.” I said, “Boolie’s got a cell phone you know, you’re not taking his cell phone if he needs to call me he needs to call me and I don’t care. You
want me to get a letter from the doctor I’ll do that too. He’s gonna have his cell phone and nobody’s [going to] take his cell phone. No, you’re not gonna take his cell phone ‘cause he needs to have access to me. Boolie needs to know that he has access to me.”

As stated earlier, Daisy is very protective of Boolie because she worries about what he went through when he was shot in the head. Henceforth, she is not going to let anyone hurt him anymore, including this teacher, who Daisy thinks is being unreasonable. The teacher is telling me how Boolie did the thing with the jacket and all but I said, “Well, the first thing is you don’t back my grandson into a corner and when my grandson stops talking to you that means for you to leave him alone. I said that’s the point where you’re gonna deal with me and not with him.” Doran (teacher) said, “Well, I wrote the paper up for him to be in ISS duh, duh, duh” and I said, “He’s not gonna be in ISS, he is not gonna be in detention, and if I need to take him out of your class, I will.” Daisy firmly stood her ground and asserted her position with the teacher by clearly and firmly stating her expectations and plan of action.

In another situation, although not as dramatic as Party’s (participant from my first case study) ghosts from the past, Daisy recalled one incident that has influenced how and when she positions herself in the school setting and in relation to school authorities. Daisy shared about how she was unduly punished in elementary school and she has never forgotten the shame and pain of that experience. I remember the one time, the one and only time when I ever got punished in school was when I got hit on the hand because whoever did the spitball wouldn’t tell and nobody else would tell and the teacher hit everybody on the hand with a ruler. I don’t believe in this - you punish everybody for something one person has done. I don’t go with that. That stayed with me all these years and it’s gonna stay with me and if my kid didn’t do the first thing he’s not going to get punished because I was wrongly punished in school. She cited the above incident as
the reason why she took Boolie home when he was going to be put into detention for fighting with another student at the middle school. When Daisy found out that this student was the instigator she refused to let her grandson be punished for pushing back. *I’m taking Boolie home and when he comes back here tomorrow he’s not going to be in ISS, he’s not going to be in detention, and he’d better be allowed to make up the homework.*” I was just so heated when I walked out of there. In all of the three situations described above, Daisy firmly took a stand and gained relative position of power by succinctly letting her opinion be known to the teacher and administrator and calmly standing her ground.

The narratives I have included in this chapter vividly illustrate the trauma and challenges that preceded the decisions Party, Daisy, and Hoke made to take legal custody of their grandchildren and assume full responsibility for raising them. These grandparents’ stories highlight their resourcefulness and strengths and one cannot help but be in awe of what they have accomplished despite everything they have had to endure. In the next chapter I give voice to my five other participants who also shared vivid stories about their lives and experiences as a grandparent raising grandchildren. In summarizing from their stories and those of Party’s, Daisy’s and Hoke’s, I discuss several unique situations as well as a number of common themes that I found in my data as I looked across the family experiences of all eight grandparents.
CHAPTER 5
LOOKING ACROSS GRANDPARENTS

In the previous chapter, I highlighted the stories of Party, Daisy, and Hoke to show a richly contextualized view of the phenomenon of grandparents raising grandchildren. In this chapter, using Party, Daisy, and Hoke as points of reference, I will look across all my data from the interviews with other grandparents to identify common patterns among the families’ experiences, and also to identify unique aspects of some families’ experiences that help us to see that the phenomenon of grandparents raising grandchildren is complex and multifaceted. But first, here are short narratives about the five other grandparents in my study.

Mrs. Lee is a 42 year old Black single grandmother with a high school diploma, is trained in cosmetology, and preaches at her church. She lives in a three bedroom 2-bathroom trailer situated in an open plot of land in Madison County, which is smaller than Clarke County but has similar socioeconomic and ethnic demographics (see table 3.1). Her two daughters, Alysha and Candace, live with her and she keeps Alysha’s eight years old son, Ben, after school. Mrs. Lee obtained permanent custody of Melia (five years old) and Joshua (three years old) in 2009 after her second daughter, Naomi, was murdered by Joshua’s father because she was going to leave him. A day after her mother was murdered, Melia, who attends kindergarten at the local primary school, told Mrs. Lee that Joshua’s father had sexually assaulted and threatened harm to her if she told anyone. Mrs. Lee volunteered to participate in my study when I met her at Community Council on Aging in July, 2011.
**Grace & Larry** are a White retired married couple, aged 62 and 63 years old respectively, who own a four bedroom 3-bathroom single story red brick home on two acres of land in a middle-class subdivision in Oconee County. They are both college graduates and have been married for ten years. This is Grace’s first marriage and Larry’s third; he has five children from his previous marriages and Lola is one of Larry’s twelve grandchildren. Grace and Larry adopted Lola in 2006 to avoid the risk of her being placed in foster care because of her mother’s illegal drug activities. To help pay for the new cost of raising a child, Larry and Grace both came out of retirement for a few years. Grace worked as an administrative assistant and Larry, who was an electrical engineer, started substitute teaching. I was Lola’s kindergarten and first grade teacher, so I have known this family for five years. Lola is now ten years old and is in fifth grade. Grace and Larry were also part of a panel of grandparents that I invited to a graduate-level class in 2009 when we were discussing families, schools, and community. They willingly volunteered to be in my study when I contacted them with an invitation to participate.

**Moon** is a 72-year old high school graduate who owns a three bedroom 2-bathroom house in Oconee in a subdivision that is beside a trailer park. She is a White divorced mother of three daughters, retired after twenty-five years as a production operator at Cowan Electronics. She is raising her ten years old great-grandchild, Brooke, who is in fifth grade, so there is a three-generation gap in this relationship. Moon obtained temporary custody of Brooke two years ago in 2009 and plans to keep her for as long as she needs to until *her mom can get herself together and straighten her life out*. Brooke’s mom lives with her mother, Moon’s daughter, about ten minutes away with Brooke’s two younger brothers. Moon was introduced to me by Grace. They know each other from their volunteering efforts at the local elementary school.
Shay was one of the grandparents who signed up for my study during the summer of 2011 when we met at CCA’s monthly support group meeting of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren. She is a 59-year old single Black grandmother of six, who holds a GED (high school diploma equivalence) and is retired from her position as a kitchen supervisor in the state prison system. She recently bought a brand new four bedrooms and 3-bathroom house in a subdivision near the local university. Shay has been the primary caregiver of and has had informal custody of her four grandchildren – Kalee (15, 10th-grade), Devon (14, 9th-grade), Pinky (13, 8th-grade), and Brock (10, 4th-grade) since 2005. Her younger daughter, Cassidy, is the grandchildren’s legal guardian, but works in the military in Washington, D.C., so Shay has done most of the raising of the children. *I had more patience and had more time to do it…I felt like I had more to give to the raising of the kids.* Shay did not want to talk about how her oldest daughter, Delia, was murdered and found in the trunk of her car by the family. She had told me about this when we met in the summer, but somehow during all three interviews, no matter how gently I tried to broach the subject and asked for details, she refused to elaborate. I respected her wishes and did not prod further.

**Unique Situations**

I found three unique situations but more shared patterns among my eight participants. The first unique situation is that Party is the only grandparent who was incarcerated. This experience has shaped her in many ways and has influenced the way she views her life and how she raises her grandchildren. During the interviews, she frequently reflected and referred to the choices she made before and after her prison term and talked about how she wants her grandchildren to learn from her mistakes. Additionally, her time in jail also created flashbacks (ghosts from the past) that still trouble Party today. One example that was mentioned earlier was
her fear of being in a courtroom because she vividly recalled being in the Camden courthouse when she was arrested and charged for her crimes. Party was very honest and forthcoming about her past criminal history. She is unashamed of it, made no excuses, and took full responsibility for the choices she made. Not wanting her grandchildren to go down the same road, she uses her life’s lessons to educate and encourages them to make better choices by learning from her mistakes.

The second unique situation is that one set of grandparents had the experience of being actively involved in their grandchildren’s lives practically from the day they were born. Daisy and Hoke have had and continue to have a profound influence on their grandchildren, so much so that the children feel more at ease living with them than with their one parent who is still alive. These grandparents have provided stability from day one and the grandchildren have lived with them more than they have with their own parents. Daisy and Hoke have provided moral, financial, and emotional support throughout the grandchildren’s lives in the hopes that this would help their parents get situated and also ensure that their grandchildren are well taken care of.

The third unique situation is that one of my participants, Moon, is a great-grandmother raising her great-granddaughter, Brooke. She is the only participant with a three-generation gap and is also the only one who cited abandonment as the sole reason she is taking care of her great-grandchild. I was introduced to Moon by another participant, Grace, and only found out during our first interview that she was raising her great-grandchild. Moon’s expectations for Brooke are similar to those of many parents, as reported in the research literature about parental engagement in different settings (Barton at al., 2004; Fields-Smith, 2005). She does not seem to let her age (72) interfere or stop her from helping Brooke as much as she can. Moon volunteers once a week at the school library, attends all school-related family activities, and helps out in Brooke’s
classroom for their class parties throughout the year. Several times a week and while Brooke is at school, Moon to her mother’s house, which is ten minutes away, to help her with doctor’s visits and other household matters.

**Themes**

I discovered a number of common themes as I sifted through the data obtained from my eight participants. The grandparents in my study can help debunk negative perceptions of grandparents by demonstrating that grandparents are articulate, confident, and have high aspirations for their grandchildren, as most parents do. This reinforced the claim made by other researchers (Fields-Smith, 2009; Gonzalez et al., 2005; Lareau, 2000) that families, including those led by grandparents, possess rich funds of knowledge and are invaluable resources that educators can tap to support children’s learning. The themes I found below illustrate the strengths and resilience of the grandparents in my study who strive to keep going despite the adversities they may face.

**What are the Reasons for Becoming a Grandparent Raising a Grandchild?**

For all of my participants, the decision to become the primary caregiver of their grandchildren was mostly unexpected and sudden, as was found by Mooradian et al. (2006) in their research with American-Indian grandparents. For four of the grandparents, the grandchildren’s first family experience was very traumatic and involved the death of a parent, similar to the experiences of other grandparent-led families described in several earlier studies (Dilworth-Anderson, 1994; Edwards, 2006; Emick & Hayslip, 1996). Shay, Mrs. Lee, Daisy, and Hoke had to endure the pain of having their children brutally murdered. Even though at least two years have passed since their children were killed, the pain was still raw and each one of these grandparents became very emotional when they were talking about the deaths. *I felt like my*
whole world just came to an end and I was, like, you gotta be kidding me, and I was screaming and I was screaming. I was just there, alone with my brother, and I’ve never screamed that loud in my entire life, and I was like, I questioned God at that point. I said, “God I do everything I can for you,” I said, “and I know God, if I could get back,” I said, “if I could get back and I could just lay hands on her and I could just pray and I know she’ll come back. You just got to let me get back to her, just let me get back.” And I didn’t get back in time and when I got back they had already sent her to the crime lab. And I was upset about that because I felt like they could have at least let me see her before they took her off, but they didn’t. This narration from Mrs. Lee about when she found out about her daughter’s death is an example of the pain the grandparents had to endure and it foreshadows the struggles they faced henceforth.

The struggles for Grace, Larry, Party, and Moon were no less difficult than that of Mrs. Lee, even if the circumstances that led to them becoming grandparents raising their grandchildren were not associated with the death of a parent. Their children were unable to parent because of their addiction to drugs, as found in Burton’s (1992) and Minkler et al.’s (1994) research; or because they were incarcerated, as found in Dressel’s and Barnhill’s (1994) research, or both. In Moon’s case, her granddaughter was simply not willing to be a responsible parent and she left her three children under the care of her mother and grandmother.

In all eight cases, the grandparents did not expect or whole-heartedly volunteer to be the custodial adult, but they all felt that it was in the best interest of their grandchildren that they took custody to prevent temporary or permanent placement of the grandchildren in the child welfare system and this coincided with findings from previous research. In their study with fifty-five grandparents who are raising grandchildren in rural areas in Maryland, North Carolina, and Virginia, Bunch et al. (2007) found that welfare systems tended to seek placements for children
among their kin when the parents are not available to provide a stable environment for the children.

**What Do Grandparents See as Their Role?**

Almost all of the grandparents said they saw themselves as the parent. Moon: *I think of myself as a mother. She doesn’t seem like a grandchild. We don’t consider her a grandchild. She’s kind of like my own. When she’s gone I miss her.* Mrs. Lee expressed the same sentiments and elaborated that her *role is the primary role because they learn from me first. I’m like a mother, I’m not a grandparent. I see my role as, you know, everything, their resources, everything that they need comes from me - their education, providing clothes, food, anything, even whatever they wanna talk about, counsel, I feel I am their prime source. I’m the first line of defense.* All the grandparents agreed that their role now as their grandchild’s guardian is similar to the roles of parents as described by the parent participants in Hoover-Dempsey’s (2005) study of parental role construction. The grandparents believed that they should not only provide the basic human needs of food, shelter, and emotional support, but that they were also responsible for nurturing and educating their grandchildren, and preparing them for a successful independent life as an adult, similar to the broad range of parents from diverse backgrounds studied in Dantas’s and Manyak’s (2010) edited book of research with families.

Shay articulated this belief when she stated that her role is to *direct, then nurture them, and make them a better person... I think you know your child is not going to be any better that what you do at home. The teachers can only do so much. The teachers are there to do everything but they can’t do it without your help. They cannot.* Larry and Grace stressed the need for them to provide the motivation to Lola to do well in school, to help her understand the purpose of school and to provide her with the skills needed for a good future, similar to parents in Gibson’s
(2005) research. It's our job as parents to reinforce what she’s learning and it’s a lot of work, it’s important, and it’s valuable, and you know we need to reinforce what’s being done in school and get involved with it. Mrs. Lee sees herself as her grandchildren’s first teacher before they get to their teacher in school.

These grandparents want to be actively involved, sharing the responsibility of educating their grandchildren with the teachers, just as many parents in Gibson’s (2005), King et al.’s (2009), and Mooradian et al.’s (2006) research, and they take this role very seriously because they know it impacts their grandchild’s education and future. Together with Hoke and Daisy, they all believe that parenting begins at home and it is their job, as the primary caregiver, to teach their grandchildren about responsibility and doing the right thing. This assertion of their key parenting roles in fostering their grandchildren’s sense of responsibility and moral decision-making parallels assertions made by parents in King et al.’s (2009), Moore’s and Miller’s (2007), and Ruiz’s and Zhu’s (2004) research.

How Do Grandparents’ Current Roles Affect Their Other Grandchildren?

One unexpected finding of my study was that three grandparents talked about how their other grandchildren did not like the idea and are bothered by the fact that the custodial grandchildren get to stay with the grandparents all the time but they cannot. Grace was especially concerned about this and her husband concurred and said that their time with the other grandchildren is now very limited since they have to consider Lola’s school schedule. I think one thing it’s really affected, because there are twelve grandchildren including Lola, and it’s kind of affected our relationship with the other grandchildren… we don’t have the flexibility to travel whenever we want to now, and I think, and I’m sure in their minds, they, especially the young ones, wonder, “Why does she (Lola) get to live with them but I can’t?” I think it has affected our
relationship with them. Grace and her husband have grandchildren living up north that they used to visit often, but not now. Larry’s voice was tinged with melancholy as he talked about how the opportunity to bond well with their other grandchildren is growing slim as these young ones grow up and become teenagers with their own social agendas that often do not include grandparents.

Mrs. Lee also mentioned that Ben, the grandson that she watches after school every day, has questioned why he could not stay with her and do fun things like Melia and Joshua could. This concern was a new discovery for me and I am grateful that my participants brought it to light. It reinforced the idea that this phenomenon of grandparents raising grandchildren is indeed complex and multifaceted, as it affects many people other than the grandparent and the grandchild they are caring for, a finding confirmed in the research with grandparents done by Houtman (2006). A number of my participants articulated this idea that taking on a primary caregiver role with some of their grandchildren has affected their roles as grandparents with their other grandchildren, and this coincided with what Doucette-Dudman (1996) found in her research with grandparents. Her participants reported a sense of resentment and displeasure from their grandchildren who were not living with them (grandparents).

How Do Grandparents See Their Grandchildren As Gifts in Their Lives that Also Involve Sacrifices?

Party’s feeling that she is blessed because of her grandchildren was shared by every one of my participants. The loss of Mrs. Lee’s daughter, Naomi, has left a gaping hole in her life but her grandchildren have helped to diminish her pain. They are [gifts] for me and I say that all the time. I say, “God, you took one home but you left me two.” The Black grandmothers in Minkler’s and Robertson-Beckley’s (1994) study related that being the primary caregivers of their
grandchildren had affected their relationships with family and friends, as well as the way they lived their lives. Similarly, Party reported that the responsibility of raising grandchildren has also made her change her lifestyle for the better and this same sentiment was also expressed by Shay. *My health was not really good before I got the kids but the responsibility of cooking, make sure they have their baths, make sure they do right, it makes you do a lot of things even when you don’t feel like it. Uh-huh, you can’t stop. It makes you a better person. They give as much as they take from you.*

The psychological and mental stress plus the health and legal issues reported by the participants in Kelley et al.’s (2001) study were similar to those mentioned by the grandparents in my study. They acknowledged the sacrifices they have made and will make, but they were also acutely aware that it was for the grandchild’s benefit and without reservation they stated that they would do it all over again if they had to. *Personally, I feel good that we’re able to provide her with a stable foundation and hopefully that’s what we’re sacrificing, if you want to put it that way. It will benefit her in the long run, it will give her an opportunity in a life she might not otherwise have had, so in that regard I feel good about that, but like I say, it does come with some sacrifice.* Larry stated these sentiments that honestly reflect and illustrate the reality of the situation of most grandparents who are raising grandchildren.

Larry’s comments relate to what Mooradian et al.’s (2006) research with grandparents found, that in a sense, thinking of their grandchildren as a gift is a way for grandparents to view the circumstances positively, knowing that their efforts will help the younger generation and this in turn will provide a better future for them. Cox (2008) found that the twenty participants in her study acknowledged the sacrifices they were making but they also celebrated the strengths and commitment they brought into the relationship. This author suggested that programs and support
groups geared towards grandparents raising grandchildren should “build on and enhance these innate abilities” (Cox, 2008, p. 475) because this helps to empower the grandparents in their role as the primary caregiver.

**What Funds of Knowledge do Grandparents Share with Their Grandchildren?**

Previous research by McIntyre, Kyle, Moore, Sweazy, and Greer (2001) on using family visits to strengthen the connection between home and school reported how parent participants in their study shared their funds of knowledge in numerous ways. Additionally, Tenery (2005) vividly described how Maria’s mother encouraged her daughter to help her cook *mole*, a traditional dish from her hometown of Puebla, Mexico. This author also observed the funds of knowledge that Maria’s father had when he shared his knowledge of trading and taxation that were related to his import/export business. Maria’s parents used their daily activities to share and impart their funds of knowledge to her to teach her ways of communicating and reasoning that could serve her well in developing academic skills she was learning at school. Similarly, the grandparents in my study discussed how they value education and they talked about ways that they are teaching their grandchildren about doing well in school.

Compton-Lilly (2010) related how a Puerto Rican mother, Marisa, emphasized to her daughter the importance of education and of doing well in school by going back to school herself to get her GED as she aspired to eventually become a registered nurse. This emphasis on education holds true for many parents, as well as grandparents in my study and in other studies. Gibson (2005) reported that the 17 African-American grandmothers she interviewed ascribed to a strong belief about the importance of education and they tried to teach good work ethics to their grandchildren to help them succeed in life. With Brooke getting ready to go into middle school, Moon advised her great-grandchild to do her best now so that 12th-grade won’t be hard
and you get the exemption, you get to work part time, and that way you don’t have to struggle as bad. I try to tell her what I learn in my lifetime, the easiest way to get it done [is] if you study hard in middle school especially. Shay also talked about how she emphasized the need to do well in school to her grandchildren. **I think of what I’ve learned and when I was getting my education. I find it was so important so now I know without it I couldn’t help them.** Hoke and Daisy are proud that their grandchildren value education as illustrated by how Nicole has developed positive work habits, making sure her work is done before she socializes with her friends.

The grandparents in my study possessed many skills and funds of knowledge to help them parent their grandchild lovingly and effectively. **I tell them so many stories. They be like “Momma where you get those stories from?” I just made it up. I used to do my girls like that, like Goldilocks and the Three Bears, we got another version and the three bears be them, so they just pay attention.** Similar to the ways Party and Daisy found creative ways to educate and maximize the use of available resources, Mrs. Lee also found innovative ways to teach her grandchildren and expand their imagination and ways of thinking. She makes learning fun, interesting, and meaningful to them by using real-life experiences, such as cooking (Compton-Lilly, 2010) and being actively involved in their learning at home and at school (Gibson, 2005).

**We go to the store and they might say, well, I want [this], and I say how much [does] it cost? How much you got? What you need? I’m constantly teaching them, constantly teaching them. I want $12 of this. How much [will] I get back? What does that say? I can’t read that. It’s too far away from me you know... So I’m constantly, you know, checking them, like see if they can read, checking to see if their eyesight [is] good enough to see the signs.** Mrs. Lee used multiple levels of questioning to teach her grandchildren how to be inquiring learners and she also sought to make connections between school learning and home-based activities, similar to the parents in
Fields-Smith’s (2008) study of middle-class African American parents who used a variety of hands-on activities, took their children on trips to local areas, and used resources from the home and community to make learning meaningful and fun for their children.

Mrs. Lee also used music to engage and keep Melia’s attention because she noticed how quickly children learn the lyrics to a song. *You can put music on and she’ll get it just like that, you know, and so what I do since she learning stuff like that, then I’m putting gospel music on and putting the Bible, reading the words I’m putting on, because they are so receptive right now. So whatever you can get them to soak up, it’s good to do it now, ‘cause they’re learning, their mind is open.* This grandparent’s astute observations and decision to use music as a vehicle of instruction demonstrates how grandparents use their funds of knowledge to teach their grandchildren.

All of my participants agreed on the importance of listening. Daisy, Hoke, and Party each specifically cited this as a vital strategy and so did Larry and the other grandparents. Mrs. Lee commented that *listening is the most important thing, just being there whenever they going through anything, just break it down, sit there, and listen to what they saying. And sometimes listen without them knowing, because a lot of time they be talking about stuff, and if you just be listening, acting like you looking at TV, you could hear a lot of stuff that they be talking about.* Mrs. Lee has found an indirect way to stay informed about her grandchildren’s lives, whilst Party used a more direct approach by simply talking with her grandchildren about their thoughts and concerns. Grandmother Oak in Gibson’s (2005) study used examples of people who have struggled and made something of themselves to set examples for her grandchildren. She discussed these role models with her 17-year old grandson and engages him in conversations to listen and guide him.
By listening attentively to their grandchildren, my participants were able to help them figure out and solve problems. Listening engages grandparents and their grandchildren together in problem solving, an example of how Moll and Gonzalez (2005) talked about funds of knowledge being actively constructed within families as parents and children and other family and community members engage together in social networks. Boolie shared about how his grandparents are especially good at listening to him and helping him to constructively face problems he may have with his peers or teachers. Mrs. Lee does something similar by trying to get to the crux of the matter. "I try to find out what it is. I don’t immediately say why you didn’t do your work. My thing is, ok, what was the problem? What happened? What’s the deal? I took the time to find out what it was, instead of telling him, automatically thinking, that he just gets in trouble, because you have to look at what kind of child you have. That child got the potential to be anything and all of a sudden they come to a roadblock. That’s what I call it, roadblock, they stop. They don’t have the enthusiasm about learning, and then that’s a roadblock, and a roadblock is that they are afraid or can’t do what’s been handed to them to do, so therefore they start pushing back, mouthing off because they don’t understand it."

These examples illustrate Daisy’s, Larry’s, and Mrs. Lee’s wisdom and patience in helping their grandsons in their learning and peer relations. They do not immediately accuse their grandsons of being insubordinate in school but first want to attend to the root of the problem for their lack of motivation. Some of the grandparents attributed their ability to react and think things through calmly to the fact that they have lived long and have had many life experiences.

The underlying theme that I found among all my participants regarding being a good listener is one of mutual respect. Moon expects her great-grandchild to respect her as one should with an elder. "I’m trying to teach her that if I say you do it, you don’t say I’ve done it and get
mad. You go on and do it and respect me as your (great) grandmother and know that’s what you are supposed to do, and don’t fuss with me ‘cause I’m old. She is clear about what she wants her great-granddaughter to do, but by the same token, she also gives as much as she is asking for. Their close relationship was evident during my visits with them as I observed the warm camaraderie between Moon and her great-granddaughter, Brooke.

A common theme was that their faith plays a big part in the lives of all my participants and has shaped them and influenced the way they raise their grandchildren. They all attend church, but Party and Mrs. Lee are the ones who consistently referred to their faith as being the sustaining power in helping them cope with life’s challenges. Mrs. Lee said I don’t think it’s nothing that can keep me from being or going to a place where I want to go. I feel that as though God has lifted me up so much to the point where I see these kids doing everything that they want to do in life, everything, there’s no, there’s no mountain too high that they can’t cross. As with me, I feel God is gonna make me a national preacher. I feel that he’s gonna make me, I’m going to travel the world and these (kids) are going to be my little sidekicks. Her trust in God is amazing and unwavering. Despite all the troubles she has encountered, Mrs. Lee has never questioned her faith. I just feel that God is gonna take us to another level. That after all that we’ve been through, that he’s gonna take this family to a point where it’s gonna be like, they’ve been through hell and high water and yet they still altogether. That’s why my book is so important, XYZ, because that’s, that’s where we’re gonna end up there, at a place where it didn’t look like we’ll ever get there. But God teaches us perseverance. The writing of the book is a way to help her grieve and heal her broken heart over the death of her child.

If there is one word that aptly describes all of my participants, it would be resilience. Webster (1992) defined resilience as an ability to “recover from or adjust easily to stress and
emotional shock” (p. 847). Mrs. Lee demonstrated her resilience when she said God gave me two for the price of one... Mama was the first line of defense and I was just back up, but now that she’s gone, then I move into the forefront, whereas I used to be the backup. So it kind of, you know, with life and, and the hand that I was dealt with, that made me have to step up to my game as being parent instead of being a grandparent. Every one of my participants displayed resilience by the simple fact that they not only became a grandparent raising grandchildren almost by default, but they also had to endure some type of traumatic or painful event and were thrust into these positions without much time to prepare for such a drastic change that subsequently affected all aspects of their lives, circumstances chronicled by other researchers (e.g. Minkler et al., 1994; Mooradian et al., 2006). Yet, the grandparents in my study kept going, forging ahead to provide for their grandchildren as best as they could, demonstrating a stance of persistence and resilience documented by other researchers (e.g. Cox, 2008).

These grandparents also displayed fortitude in the way they live their lives. Party’s statement of I’m trying. I give out but I won’t give up and Shay’s comment that No matter how tired it is, I just keep at it, just keep on at it, shows how they are determined to do what is good for their grandchildren even if it is at their expense (Kelly et al., 2001). Larry summed this up when he said I kind of don’t think about what if we haven’t done this, what could we be doing? I don’t dwell on this. It is the way it is and we’re alright, we are doing ok. Additionally, they share wisdom from having lived through many life experiences.

Shay, for example, has learned to say no and to set limits so that she does not set herself up for failure or tax herself too much. As her grandchildren were creating their collages and she was talking to them, Shay advised them to prioritize and focus on school and not let peer pressure sway them. I learn don’t take on no more than you can do, because I don’t care how
much they push, don’t let them push you into more than you feel like you’re capable of doing now. Mrs. Lee’s said *It brought us close together because we learned a lesson through all of it. And the lesson was, we’re here and the next day you may be gone. So we might as well love on each other now while we have a chance and don’t waste time arguing about this and that.* This honest perspective is echoed by several of my participants because they realized that life is too short and can be taken away in an instant. They have experienced that first hand and want their grandchildren to make the best of their lives despite the adversities they have encountered.

**What are the Grandparents’ Social Networks and How Do They Use Them?**

All of my participants relied, in varying degrees, on others within their social networks to help them raise their grandchildren. Gibson (2005) and Ruiz and Zhu (2004) also found this to be true among the African-American grandmothers in their study. These grandmothers along with the grandparents in my research sought out extended family; teachers; other parents; people in the church and other non-profit organizations, such as CCA, Boy Scouts; and people at the local university for assistance. Moon talked about how she was willing to ask anybody for help, including calling other parents. *Me and the other parents, we get together on the phone and talking and if one of us don’t know something, we’ll call the other one. We’ll eventually get it somewhere or another, so that helps when the kids are friends. Brooke has a friend and we’ll call them, like Sara, she is a big help with a lot of stuff, and the teachers are great too. They reciprocate and help each other, asking for assistance for a variety of reasons ranging from homework, to extra-curricular activities, to advice about their grandchildren’s relationships with their peers.*

Barton et al. (2004) refers to this as building “sustaining relationships” (p. 3) and Grace reiterated how important it was that *the teachers and parents, everybody kind of know each other*
on some level where it’s not complete strangers and this is helpful to her because she trusts the people within her social network. In their study with African-American grandparents, Moore and Miller (2007) found that the informal support from their participants’ social network was vital to them because the people in their social network - extended family, friends, neighbors, and church members, provided emotional and tangible support that enhanced the grandparents’ psychological well-being. Gibson (2005) pointed out that the extended family and social network of the 17 African-American grandmothers in her study provided respite to her participants and they were also positive role models for the grandchildren. Additionally, from their study about kinship care and 31 American Indian grandparents, Mooradian et al. (2006) described the added advantage of a bond that could develop within these extended social networks of support that benefits grandparents and grandchildren, plus others around them.

Shay shared how she relies on her church, family, and the teachers for assistance and states that they are the ones she calls on when she needs help or just a listening ear. Sometimes when I get tired of interpreting a problem, I just call and talk it over with one of my daughters and they give me a suggestion. Mrs. Lee also attributed the source of her strength to family members. My girls, they are so inspirational to me. They listen, they are listeners and they be like, Mama, you can do anything you set your mind to. She also spoke about how when she was growing up, the teachers back then were like her mom and dad at school and the principal was like Big Daddy, so you know you had love, even though they got your behind when you’re bad, you felt a lot of love from them. Mrs. Lee shared that she liked how her granddaughter has a caring teacher who is aware of what she has gone through and Mrs. Lee appreciated the way she loves and cares for Melia. She (the teacher) understands things that are going on. And she’s just like Melia’s mother away from home. And when Melia’s having a bad day, she gets Melia and
she love on her and she takes a break from her class and she loves on her. Having an understanding and compassionate teacher is seen as especially crucial by the grandparents for the children who have gone through the trauma of losing a parent, because they see the need for assurance and stability from the people who are their caregivers.

**How Do Grandparents Reach Out to Help Others?**

One of the findings of my study that is impressive is the way these grandparents reciprocate the support they receive from the community by helping others. Mrs. Lee showed great compassion by using the tragedy of her daughter’s demise to help others. Her active contribution towards the wider community through her efforts to stop domestic violence, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, is one worth mentioning because of the broad range of her outreach and the various methods she is using through her book, poems, preaching, school talks, and radio broadcast to spread her message. The fact that she is willing to repeatedly share the painful story of her daughter’s murder speaks volumes for her willingness to give back to the community at large. Similarly, Party’s hope of speaking to the Black male prisoner population reflects how these grandparents are thinking beyond their own families. They have endured pain and loss beyond what most of us have experienced, and yet they are willing to give to others in the hopes of helping someone else.

In the previous chapter, I shared about how Party did not hesitate to welcome with open arms her neighborhood children and those of her friends, and she was also not afraid to chastise them as a parent would, if needed. Mrs. Lee too enjoys being with children so much so that she said, *I am a magnet to kids. They are my first passion. I wanna make sure that they are protected at all times. I wanna make sure that they’ve learn at all times. You know, I check all of them.* This idea of watching over everyone’s children is much like the concept of ‘it takes a village to
raise a child’ and was mentioned by several of my participants. *Everyone, everybody that they [are] around [with] should be teaching them something.* Party confidently acknowledged that teachers, family, church family, neighbors, and CCA were instrumental in helping her raise her four grandchildren. *You see I got to give everybody credit, cos it takes all of us. I can’t do it by myself, the teachers can’t do it by theirselves, and most of it start at home. And I thank my mom and dad for my raising, because not only did they help me with my child, they also help with my grandchildren, their great-grandchildren. My sister, my aunts, my uncles, cousins, I mean it takes everybody!*

Daisy and Hoke spoke about the village concept originating with Black people. *That’s the thing from the days of slavery...Black people they come more together.* And Boolie, their grandson, gave an example from his own experiences: *They still have that now, like if I fight somebody, his cousin gonna come at me and his brother going to be with him, you know, it’s a big village thing, but it’s with the Black people.* Fields-Smith (2008) also spoke about this village ideology with reference to older Black parents reaching out to other younger parents, feeling responsibility for the school as a whole, for all the children, and not just for their own children.

**What are Some of the Grandparents’ Personal Experiences with the Schools?**

All my participants addressed specific incidents with school personnel with regard to their grandchildren’s education. Daisy’s, Hoke’s, and Party’s experiences were narrated in the case studies presented earlier; Larry cited having to confront the principal over his granddaughter’s starting date at the school as an example. Concerns with school personnel’s lack of sensitivity to the plight and struggles of grandparents who are raising grandchildren was addressed by several of my participants.
A prime example was given by Mrs. Lee when she shared that every year, she has had to explain her situation and the circumstances that led to her having permanent custody of her grandchildren to the children’s teachers. *I think I have more to go through as a grandparent than I did as a parent. You know, simply because I am the grandparent, because they make you jump through all these hoops as being a grandparent versus being a parent, and it gets aggravating. And [they question] are you the legal guardian?...It should be on the records, but obviously they’re not reading it. It’s making me aggravate. They have to keep saying ok, her mom is gone and that’s this and that, and I get tired of answering and going through that, we’re going through that, re-living my daughter’s [death]. And they say, I’m sorry to hear that, but yet, I hope next year I don’t have to go through this again.* On another note, Shay referred to conference times as a point of concern. *That just gets to be so overpowering sometimes, all on the same day for conferences. It’s hard to balance, but they don’t understand that, because they don’t know it’s probably four in one household.* Shay would like the school to stagger conferences on different days so that she can attend them without feeling overwhelmed at having to rush from one classroom and/or school to another.

Just as Daisy had been vocal and clear about what she expected from her grandson’s biology teacher, Mrs. Lee was also adamant about informing her granddaughter’s teacher that she would like the teacher to contact her early if there were concerns. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) and Soodak et al. (2002) also spoke about the need for teachers to keep in regular contact with parents, and not just through the bi-annual parent conferences, which are often a one-sided “teacher talks to the parent” form of communication, but also through regular phone calls or notes sent home. Mrs. Lee compared her current relationship with her granddaughter’s teacher to when her daughters were in school, the teacher would call when a problem arose so they could
nip it in the bud. As opposed to now, the teachers kind of let it go on until they absolutely had enough. Then they contact the parents and then they have this long list to show you instead of just stopping it right then. My participants stated that regular communication is essential in building a good relationship with families, grandparents included, and that is something I will highlight to school personnel when I share my study with them.

What are the Grandparents’ Concerns and Worries?

Due to the two-generation gap between the grandparents and the grandchildren, several of my participants wanted to share about their worries and concerns from where they stood. Larry spoke about the psychological aspect and the fact that they are much older than the parents of their grandchild’s peers. The fact that as grandparents we’re all in our generation, we think one way and that generation now thinks a different way. It is not necessarily bad, it’s just different. It’s just the way it is and you have to kind of realize that, just because you’ve done it that way or that’s the way you were brought up, that may not be the way it’s gonna work now. Some of those values are, I guess, timed to some degree. But it’s hard too, you know, you just have to, I guess, adapt, and it’s difficult to do when you’re older parents, 20-50 years difference parent, grandparents 40-50 years difference. And so you just have to make an effort to understand where they’re coming from, and you kind of make adjustments both ways, both sides.

Larry’s wife concurred and added that grandparents need to be patient and make a concerted effort to re-learn the present culture and accept the fact that it is not like it was forty to fifty years ago, so they have to adapt to the way, the new culture of the world today, even though one might not always agree with it. As I listened to my participants share their concerns, I noticed that for many of them it was important that their grandchild does not stand out or is not singled out because they are being raised by grandparents. They want the child to fit in with their
peers, and so these grandparents are willing to adapt and learn about the current culture and social practices and conform to them to a certain extent.

Mrs. Lee succinctly illustrated how being her grandchildren’s primary caregiver has changed her role from being just their grandma. *When she (daughter) was here I was Grandma. We did the grandma thing, because I can do whatever I want with them and then I can send them back home. But now it’s do with them every day, so I think as a parent instead of a grandparent...I can say that being a parent is way different than being a grandparent. Now I take on the role as really being a parent and not the grandparent, simply because what I used to let my grandkids get away with, these are not grandkids, these are my kids. So they don’t have the benefit of, you know, I can let you eat this and send you back to Mama, you know. Now, no means no (laughs).* This change in the grandparent’s role from grandparent to custodial caregiver was also addressed by Kelley et al. (1997) and Moore and Miller (2007). Both groups of researchers looked at how this change in their roles affected the grandparents’ mental and physical well-being and explored ways and resources that may help alleviate the psychological stress that grandparents experience now that they are sole guardians of their grandchildren.

All my participants seemed acutely aware of their mortality and the limited time that they have with their grandchildren. It is almost like they had to do a crash course of teaching their grandchildren the ways of life and imparting their wisdom to them in a much shorter time frame than most parents have, simply because they are older. Grace said that *because we’re older, she’s got to get an education, she’s got to learn to be independent, she’s got to learn to take care of herself, because we are not going to be around to help her as a lot of parents help their children, their adult children, now. We won’t be around, so we really are concerned about, hopefully, helping her to prepare for adulthood.* The weighty responsibility of being a parent again in their
retirement age is heavy on their minds. Larry hoped that he and his wife will have the opportunity to enjoy their time together without the responsibility for parenting that they have now. That’s so, so far off, and at our age so many things could happen physically. It’s hard to say, it’s hard to really plan ten years down the road, because we are closer to our own mortality. So that tends to affect the way we think.

Despite the uncertainty of what lies ahead, all my participants said that they would do it all again if they had to. Their selfless attitude and love for their grandchildren is very humbling. The grandchildren seem to be aware of the sacrifices their grandparents are making. In their own ways, they respect and love their grandparents and that has been a healing balm for my participants. Lola’s description of her grandparents as regular parents but just older made her grandparents smile and it is times like these that tell Grace, Larry, and the other grandparents that they made the right choice and are doing a good job of raising their grandchildren.

**What Advice Do Grandparents’ Have for Schools and Teachers?**

As a teacher, I learned from the grandparents about what I can do to help them and to make their job of raising their grandchildren easier. All but one of the grandparents mentioned specific things that they would like teachers to do. Daisy’s suggestion that schools should be proactive and reach out to grandparents is similar to what Moon expressed when she talked about her desire to build a good relationship with the schools and how she wants teachers to feel free to contact her as soon as there is a concern. *I want them to know that I’m trying here as hard as I can and I’m just a soul by myself with her. If there’s anything at school that they need to know about her, all they have to do is call me and let me know. And if they need me to come in, just call me and I’ll be there. I want to have a good relationship with her teachers, you know, and be able to talk to them and carry on a conversation. Let me know if there’s something bad with her,*
tell me, you know, a truthful relationship with the teachers and the school. And if it's bad then let me know and I'll get it straightened out. Here, Moon is asking for what Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) referred to as “truths the hand can touch” (p. 105), whereby a teacher’s accurate articulation and narration of the child reveals a core truth about that student, thus conveying to the parent that the teacher truly knows the child.

Party and Moon want to have a strong partnership with teachers and they want to be kept informed of both good and bad developments. This echoes what Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) talked about when she pointed out that

When parents hear the teacher capture the child that they know, they feel assured that their child is visible in her classroom – that the teacher actually sees and knows him or her – and they get the message that she really cares. (p. 104)

From my experience as a teacher, I have found that making and staying in regular contact with families from the beginning of the school year is essential in helping to build positive relationships with families. After listening to my grandparent participants, I can see that this is even more vital with grandparent-led households, because for many of them, it has been a long time since they had to communicate with teachers or attend to school-related issues.

Mrs. Lee suggested that teachers should be made aware that these are grandparent-led families. They need to listen to grandparents, talk things through and help them understand the new materials and expectations that have emerged as compared to the time when their children were in school, such as daily homework and the use of an ‘agenda book’ as a communication tool. She indicated that it might be better to call and talk to grandparents to make sure they get the messages, because notes can get lost in the book bags.
Grandparents, just like parents, want to be kept updated on their child’s progress, and several of my participants asked that teachers contact them immediately if there is a concern so that they can address it and take action. I know I feel like if we can nip in the bud these kids acting up in school during that first week, then it won’t mess them up for next week. If they did alright that week, then their teacher ain’t gotta call, but if they had some problems, then call. Grandparents want to work with the teachers to support the grandchild’s education and they are aware that they cannot do it alone. They seek the teacher’s help, and most of them trust that the teacher, being the trained professional, will offer sound guidance. Mrs. Lee implied that calling makes the contact more personal and it also sends the message to the grandparent and the child that the teacher cares enough to take the time to make that call and this may in turn motivate the child to do his best.

This connectedness relates to what Allen (2007) described as “a dialogue based on mutual respect” (p.41) and a phone call at the beginning of the school year could be a great way to start this conversation by welcoming families and starting a positive relationship with any parent or grandparent. As Mrs. Lee suggested, make the grandparents feel comfortable because a lot of times we don’t feel comfortable, simply because we are not the parent. Grandparents, like Mrs. Lee, are willing to learn alongside their grandchildren and work with the teachers, and they are amazed at the things students are expected to learn at school these days. An example was when Melia came home saying Ma, water is a liquid, ice is a solid. When you boil it mama, it’s a gas. She’s learning, and so I’m like, ok, this is kindergarten and she’s learning about this and so it inspires me. Not only is she learning, I’m learning also and I wanna learn how. What’s the next level? We don’t want to stay right here. We want what’s the next level, so it’s good to give us what level we’re on right now, and give us the next level so we can advance, because I think
these kids are so smart... I look at kids and I admired by it, period, because I look at them as a little sponge and they are forever soaking up everything educational-wise. Mrs. Lee’s desire to learn with her grandchild and stay abreast with the curriculum depicts her strong sense of efficacy and willingness to be a lifelong learner.

Larry, married to Grace, felt it would be helpful for the children to have a counselor-led support group of peers who are also being raised by their grandparents, so that they can share stories and advice because their problems are unique, but it will also help them to know that they are not alone in this situation. He mentioned one of his granddaughters being in a similar support group when her parents were going through a divorce and feels that a group for children raised by grandparents would be very beneficial. Grace, step-grandmother to Larry’s grandchild, also suggested a mentor program for grandparents led by another parent. I mean for us it was a big adjustment, especially for me. I never had a child [by birth], so it was a big change. I think I’ve been pretty flexible, and in the school that I was involved in, I was welcomed and I could not have had a better experience. But I’m sure that’s not the case for every grandparent, so maybe they [can partner] with another parent who could kind of show them around. I thought this was a great idea and will suggest it to my administrators because being partnered with a parent seems like a friendlier arrangement and will probably be less intimidating to the grandparents than for them to be paired with school personnel.

As I had anticipated, I found many commonalities shared among my eight participants. The grandparents in this study experienced some type of significant event or trauma that propelled them into the position of being the custodial grandparent for their grandchild. They each constructed a parental role for themselves as they raised their grandchildren, and this parental role affected some of my participants’ relationships with their other grandchildren who
do not live with them. All my participants unanimously stated that their grandchildren have
enriched their lives, but they also acknowledged the sacrifices they have had to make to be where
they are. Similar to findings cited by earlier studies with parents (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Moll &
Greenberg, 1998), I also discovered that grandparents possess and use their rich funds of
knowledge and social networks as they interact with schools. Finally, I discussed grandparents’
stories of concerns drawn from their experiences as parents of grandchildren, and closed the
chapter with how grandparents suggested they would like teachers and other school personnel to
help them raise their grandchildren. In my next and final chapter, I give an overview of my study
and findings and I discuss the implications, limitations, and affordances that pertain to my
research work and offer several suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

After listening to my participants, I was able to formulate several conclusions and implications that I drew from their stories regarding their life experiences, struggles, and challenges. One of the questions I asked at the start of my study was, how can teachers, administrators, and other school personnel support these grandparents as they raise their grandchildren in an era that is sometimes quite foreign to them, being that there is a two generation gap between them and their grandchildren and the schools of today? To situate my findings, I will first present an overview of my study and look at the conclusions drawn from the data I have collected and analyzed. I will then discuss the implications and limitations to my research before offering suggestions for future research.

Overview

To show the multifaceted and complex nature of the phenomenon, I explored the social and cultural factors that influence how grandparents engage in their grandchild’s learning and schooling. I examined how grandparents’ reported that their life experiences affected the way they parent their grandchildren and investigated how grandparents viewed their role construction, funds of knowledge, and social networks. I considered how grandparents authored and positioned themselves in relations to schools when addressing their grandchild’s education.

The overarching frame for my research was Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory and under this theory I incorporated the foundational principle that knowledge is socially constructed. Building on Vygotsky’s (1978) theory, I also used the following conceptual
frameworks, namely, a) funds of knowledge as a vital component in family-school relations, b) authoring and positioning as a means of asserting one’s place as a parent or grandparent taking on the role of parent in schools, and c) all families construct and are part of social networks.

Sociocultural theory, building on the work of other researchers with families and communities (e.g. Barton et al., 2004; Gonzalez et al., 2005; Kelley et al., 2001) was the appropriate theoretical lens for my research because it helped me to examine the social and cultural contexts and to look at the social and interactional dimensions of grandparents raising grandchildren. I explored the following research questions to listen to grandparents’ stories about raising grandchildren:

1) What are grandparents’ stories about their experiences raising grandchildren in relation to supporting their grandchildren’s education at home and at school?

   a) How do grandparents construct and view their roles?

   b) How do they use their funds of knowledge and the social network support that is available to them?

The primary method of collecting data was Seidman’s (2006) 3-interviews model that uses an open-ended and semi-structured interview protocol. This qualitative case study was framed broadly in the interpretive paradigm using thematic analysis to arrive at the commonalities and differences pertaining to grandparents raising grandchildren. To explore and analyze my data, I selected aspects of grounded theory - constant comparative analysis, and specifically, coding, memo writing, and theoretical sampling, to inquire and inform my data analysis method and to help me make meaning of the grandparents’ stories. I interviewed eight grandparents who are raising grandchildren in two separate Georgia school systems in grades K-12. I also interviewed the grandchildren and recorded the grandparent-grandchild interactions
and conversations during a Family Collage activity. Based on the results of this study, I argue that teachers and school personnel would benefit from professional learning opportunities to better understand the needs of these grandparents and seek ways to actively support and engage them in their grandchild’s education. Finally, I offer recommendations for future research, as many new questions emerged as I drew this study to a close.

**Conclusions**

This study extended previous research on grandparents raising grandchildren. First, the grandparents in my study become the primary caregivers of their grandchildren because of extenuating and traumatic circumstances beyond their control, and this is similar to what several researchers reported in their studies. Some of the reasons cited in previous research that were similar to the reasons my participants cited were: to circumvent placement of their grandchildren into the child welfare system (Bunch et al., 2007); death of a parent due to HIV (Caliandro & Hughes, 1998); incarceration of mothers (Dressel & Barnhill, 1994); parental abuse and neglect (Minkler et al., 1994); drug addiction and parental abandonment in a Black community (Taylor, Tucker, Chatters, & Jayakody, 1997); and substance abuse and teen pregnancy of American Indians (Mooradian et al., 2006).

Next, I found that the grandparents in my study possess rich funds of knowledge that they want to impart to their grandchildren and they have similar goals for their grandchildren, just as parents do. Most grandparents, including those cited in the preceding paragraph, assumed the role of primary caregiver out of necessity and often in extenuating circumstances involving trauma for them and for their grandchildren. The grandparents in these studies reported having to cope with feelings of despair caused by the contributing factors listed above, with some even leading to death or incarceration of a child who was a parent. They had to adapt to changes in
their lifestyles and manage personal health and financial issues (Minkler et al., 1994) while juggling the needs of their grandchildren (Gibson, 2005; Weber & Waldrop, 2001), and sometimes parents’ and other adult children’s needs too.

Teachers, administrators, and other school personnel have little experience working with this mature generation of care-givers. Educators often group them together with parents without considering issues that stem from the two-generation gap between grandparent and grandchild and the often traumatic circumstances in which grandparents and their children become a primary family unit. The challenges that grandparents raising grandchildren face are daunting and they often must fend for themselves with little or no support from their families, community, schools, or social services.

My findings suggest that grandparents have invaluable funds of knowledge, which Gonzalez et al. (2005) described as historically grounded and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills that include the family’s lived experiences and practices that help the family function in society, that could be tapped in schools. Other researchers (e.g. Compton-Lilly, 2010; Hara & Burke, 1998; Yeager & Cordova, 2010) posit that few other ideas or resources would likely impact the learning environment as much as having parents (and grandparents) become, in effect, extensions of the teachers and their classrooms, through incorporating families’ funds of knowledge in the classroom curriculum.

Similarly, grandparents, just like parents, want to be involved in their grandchildren’s schooling and learning. Fields-Smith (2007) found that the 19 African-American parents in her study had strong desires to be engaged in their children’s education. They volunteered and actively supported the teachers and believed it was their responsibility to initiate contact and build a relationship with their child’s teacher. Allen (2007) posits that parents have a lot to offer
and are an invaluable and often untapped resource that can enhance the development of the child as a whole person and she encourages teachers to solicit their input and to collaborate with parents. This is sound advice that other teachers and I, as well as school personnel, should heed by taking advantage of the diverse grandparent voices articulated in the research reported here to better understand the phenomenon of grandparents raising grandchildren, more effectively serve the grandparents and students in our schools, and draw on their rich funds of knowledge to support children’s learning.

The grandparents in this study, like parents in research conducted by others (Hoover-Dempsey, 2005; Lareau, 2000), generally want to help their children reach or exceed their potential in both school and life. Barton et al (2004) reported that many of the working and middle-class parents in their study were willing to make sacrifices and go outside of their comfort zone to ask for assistance to achieve this goal. Fields-Smith (2005) described how the participants in her research work with African-American parents who home-schooled their children reached out to their social networks, which may include family members, school personnel, and others in their community to help them help their children.

**Implications**

Several implication emerged from my study, not only denoting the struggles and challenges faced by grandparents, but also, and more importantly, highlighting these grandparents’ strengths in using their rich funds of knowledge, maximizing the resources available through their social networks, and advocating for their grandchildren to help a younger generation build a good future for themselves.
Grandparents Tread Into New Territory When They Raise Grandchildren

Previous research has shown that the decision to take on the responsibility of caring for a grandchild is often made to prevent temporary or permanent placement of grandchildren in the child welfare system (Bunch et al., 2007). This was the reason Larry and Grace adopted Lola, their 5-year old granddaughter. Her mother was unable to stop abusing drugs and they were afraid Lola would be put into foster care. *It just got down to a situation where if we didn’t take her, somebody in the family did not take her, then she would have gone to foster care and gone to who knows where.* This new parental responsibility presented a set of challenges and dilemmas because it affected these grandparents’ well-being, lifestyles, and daily routines. Party succinctly illustrated her position as *being between a hard place and a rock.* Grandparents reported feeling that they do not have much of a choice but to take the grandchild under their wings or bear the guilt of leaving the child to fend for herself or go into foster care.

This change in lifestyle was even more drastic for Mrs. Lee. She was only 40 years old, and had already raised three adult children of her own, when she became the primary caregiver of a baby and a toddler! *I didn’t want to start all over again and I actually did start over when he (Joshua) was just in diapers and the whole nine yards. So that’s the main way that my life has changed.* Mrs. Lee hardly had time to take a breather between being a parent and starting the role of a doting grandparent before she had to start over and raise her grandchildren. Being a young grandparent, though, gave her the advantage of having more energy, and she was also more familiar with her grandchildren’s generation, but this is usually not the case for most grandparents raising grandchildren.

The two generation age gap between grandparents and grandchildren was voiced as a concern by several of my participants. Their current mortality rate is much shorter than that of
the parents simply because they were born earlier. In light of this, they are acutely aware that they have a limited number of years to raise and impart their wisdom and knowledge on the grandchildren. *One thing that was always, that’s been at the back of my mind, is that because we’re older, she’s got to get an education, she’s got to learn to be independent, she’s got to learn to take care of herself, because we are not going to be around to help her as a lot of parents help their children, their adult children now. We won’t be around, so we really are concerned about hopefully helping her to prepare for adulthood.* This concern lay heavily on the mind of all of my participants. There was urgency in their voices as they shared about wanting to teach their grandchildren lessons they (grandparents) have learned in their lives. They wanted to impart their wisdom and they worried about not having enough time to do this.

Just like parents, grandparents raising grandchildren have to experiment and find a balance between engagement and intrusiveness, between accompanying their grandchildren and giving them the space to develop independence. Often, they feel off balance, defensive, and ill equipped to play their roles productively and strategically. This feeling of inadequacy was also shared by parents from various socioeconomic and racial backgrounds and was expressed by numerous parents cited in Lareau’s (2000) work with working-class and middle-class families in the San Francisco Bay area in Northern California. Similar to the parents in Lareau’s (2000) study, grandparents too are unclear about how to best advocate for their grandchildren. They feel alone and lost, as voiced by some of the grandparents in Houtman’s (2006) study, but unlike some parents who might be afraid to reveal their anxiety to teachers and even to other parents, my participants were willing to *step up to the plate* and approach teachers, administrators, and other adults in their grandchildren’s lives when there was a concern.
Grandparents Juggle Many Roles and Face Numerous Challenges

These grandparents have the added responsibility of managing not only their lives and those of their grandchildren but often, many of them have elderly parents to care for too. They may also have their own personal concerns pertaining to their health, employment, finance, and emotional well-being, as was found in earlier research by Kelly et al. (2001) and Minkler et al. (1994). Some may even have to cope with conflict in their relationships with their own children, as was found in Minkler et al.’s (1997) research, thereby adding to their emotional strain. Party, a single grandmother of four children, was thrust into the position of raising her son’s children whilst also having the responsibility of caring for her 81-year old father, managing her own health problems, and coping with her grandchildren’s emotional well-being as they adjusted to living with her.

Additionally, Party had maintained an on-again-off-again relationship with her son and also worked on building a cordial relationship with the children’s mother. In their writings about grandparents raising grandchildren, both Minkler et al. (1997) and Kelley et al. (2001) addressed this parent-child relationship as one that often brings conflict and stress to the grandparent. They suggested that grandparents may feel psychologically distressed and isolated and can have feelings of failure and doubt regarding their ability as a parent that may emerge because their own child is incapable of raising his child. Further stress was added on if the grandparent and parent were estranged and did not part on good terms, as was the case with Party, Grace, and Larry in my study. Houtman (2006) stated that resentment could increase if grandparents felt they did not have much choice but to put their own needs on hold as they built their lives around their grandchildren’s schedules. Shay, Moon, Party, Grace, and Larry in my study talked about the challenges of having to plan around the school calendar and school day so they could parent,
help with homework, and cater to the grandchild’s medical, physical, and social needs. Kelley et al. (2001) indicated that the grandchildren’s behavior and emotional problems due to being displaced may cause further strain on the grandparents and cause them to be resentful or angry.

Being in a position of holding multiple roles was shared by my other participants too. I did not, however, notice resentment or anger in anyone, but rather, there was a sense of resignation that this is what they needed to do for their grandchildren. For Larry and Grace it meant coming out of retirement to support their grandchild. Hesitantly and after a long moment of reflection, Larry shared, *if given a choice I certainly wouldn’t want to be doing this. I don’t begrudge the fact that I am doing this but it’s obviously had a big impact on everything we do - how we live, where we go, what we can do, what we can’t do, where we live. It’s completely changed everything, what we do, everything!* As difficult as it was for Larry, his statement aptly describes the situations in which these grandparents see themselves, what Waldrop and Weber (2001) referred to as going from becoming a grandparent to a caregiver, when they explored the stresses and satisfaction of this changing role with the grandparents in their study. This raising of a grandchild was not part of Larry’s retirement plans and I doubt it is in any other grandparent’s plans either.

**Grandparents Have Rich Funds of Knowledge to Share**

The grandparents’ funds of knowledge come from many sources, including their life experiences, faith in God, and personal values. Funds of knowledge are historically grounded and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills. It is the social sharing of its funds of knowledge that helps the family and its members function in society. The funds of knowledge of the grandparents in my study were similar to what parents in other studies (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Moll & Greenberg, 1992; Monzo, 2010) have reported: wanting to share with their children,
namely, to impart their funds of knowledge to their children in the hopes that they will have a fulfilling life. Daisy and Hoke, for example, supported and helped their three grandchildren to excel in school and in their personal lives by teaching them about self-respect, good work ethics, conflict resolution, and ways to build strong relationships with others.

All my participants placed a high value on education and wanted it to be a priority for the grandchildren; this finding paralleled what Gibson (2005) found in her study of African-American grandmothers who emphasized the importance of education as a vital step to a productive life and wanted their grandchildren to focus on learning.

**Grandparents Utilize Social Networks as They Interact with Others**

Grandparents’ social networks consist of multiple relationships, bidirectional exchanges, and mutual support and exchanges that often incorporate non-relatives and different age groups, as discussed by several researchers in their work with families. Compton-Lily (2010) cited the example of a 22-year old Puerto Rican single mother and Perry (2010) described how two families of Sudanese refugees, an 18-year old boy and a 5-year old girl, negotiated and used their connections with others within and outside of their community. This included the concepts of “reciprocity, a key characteristic of social exchanges” (p. 326) identified in the research of Moll and Greenberg (1992), and *confianza* or the reciprocal exchange relations that form social networks among households that was addressed by (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. 6) in their research about funds of knowledge within Latino communities in Tucson, Arizona.

Social networking allows families to form social contexts for transmission of knowledge, skills, information, cultural values and norms (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Lareau, 2000; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992) through their relationships and interactions with each other. Barton et al (2004) provided examples of how parents drew on these networks to make decisions for the child
based on the information they received from their social contacts through casual conversations (Burr, 1995) or intentional inquiries. Lareau (2000) described how parents in working and middle-class families obtained information because “mothers had other mothers to talk to” (p.65) and became like sounding boards, support group, and advisors for each other. Moon demonstrated this talking to others method and was a grandmother who was proactive in seeking resources, assistance, and advice from others to help 10-year Brooke when she had trouble with the 5th grade math curriculum. At the same time, she also helped other parents when they called on her for advice or assistance.

Party actively sought out others to help her with her grandchildren’s schooling and extracurricular activities and she also utilized the resources afforded to her through the Community Council on Aging, her church, and the community outreach programs that enhance grandparents’ well-being (Gerard, Landry-Meyer, & Guzell-Roe, 2006) by helping them share their small victories, identify short-term goals, recount humorous life events, and remind each other of good things in their lives. Several researchers (King et al., 2009; Mooradian et al., 2006; Moore & Miller 2007) expressed how being a member of informal social support networks helped grandparents because these support groups offer increased socialization and opportunities for grandparents to share experiences with caregiver peers and hence they provided psychological benefit and had a preventive effect, possibly reducing stress and risk of mental health problems for these grandparents. Gibson (2005) found that the external informal social support from extended family and neighbors also provided respite to grandparents and served as positive role models for the grandchildren.

The grandparents in my study were not only recipients of support within their social networks; they were also givers of support (Kroeger, 2007). Daisy reached out to provide social
support to her granddaughter’s friends as they adjusted to the challenges and pressures of high school, illustrating the sense of reciprocity within social networks discussed by Gonzalez et al. (2005). Overall, the grandparents in my study acknowledged and deeply appreciated the value of their social networks, especially in times of great challenges. This is similar to the participants in other studies (Gibson, 2005; Sheldon, 2002) who also expressed similar gratitude for having strong social network support which they could depend on for advice and support.

**Grandparents Used Authoring and Positioning to Make Their Voices Heard**

Parents’ authoring and positioning activities have been elaborated mostly in the context of schools (Barton et al., 2004; Fields-Smith, 2006), but in my study grandparents also authored roles for themselves and positioned themselves in their communities and neighborhoods. All of my participants regarded education as a means to personal, social, and occupational success. They were proactive in acquiring assistance and taking advantage of resources available in the schools and within the community, what Barton et al. (2004) described as “authoring,” actions that illustrate how [grand]parents use tools and resources to create space where they can formulate their own ways of supporting their [grand]children’s learning. “Positioning,” on the other hand, explains how [grandparents] can use this new space to influence others (p. 8). In my study, Party positioned herself as a parent in the school with her direct approach to discipline by being assertive in voicing her philosophy and expectations. She also authored a space for herself as her grandchildren’s advocate by inquiring about and making use of the resources available in the school and through her interactions with teachers, administrators, and other school personnel. A similar example was cited in Barton et al.’s (2004) work when they referred to how Celia, a mother in their study, asked the teacher if she could provide more rigorous work to her child as she believed her child was very capable of being challenged.
Party’s assertive approach with educators at her grandchildren’s schools is supported by Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (1978, 2003) argument that teachers need to learn to value the authority and wisdom of parents and recognize the contributions that they make to the child’s success in school. By developing a peripheral vision of the broad ecology of education, teachers can help support grandparents like the ones in my study as they recognize that students are socialized by numerous members and institutions within their communities. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1978) also suggested that teachers need to develop strategies, tools, and skills for supporting productive dialogues with parents learning to listen patiently and respectfully to parental perspectives on their children, develop powers of observation and a genuine attitude of care to show that they see a vivid portrayal of the child. These same suggestions could be extended to grandparents and they may help grandparents to feel valued, welcomed, appreciated, and empowered (Fields-Smith, 2005). Works by Gibson (2005) and Minkler and Fuller-Thomson (2005) reported that the African-American grandmothers in their studies were willing to meet challenges head-on when they received, for example, good socio-emotional support and were able to maintain effective communication within their family and community.

Similar to the parents Barton et al. (2004) described in their work, the grandparents in my study also used authoring and positioning to construct their roles in schools. They illustrated the notions of authoring and positioning by having agency in relation to the school, taking action, and being highly engaged by creating roles and spaces for themselves that are not the traditional ones designed by the teachers and schools. One of my findings revealed that socioeconomic class appears to play a role in how vocal and assertive a grandparent was when faced with a situation in school. Grandparents who considered themselves middle class were more likely to approach the principals, whereas working-class grandparents were more apt to speak to the teachers first,
before they considered going to the administrators. This may be because working-class parents consider teachers as the trained professionals and may feel more comfortable sharing their concerns with them first. Middle-class grandparents may either consider themselves equally qualified as teachers or as in the example of Larry and Grace below, they bypass the teacher for matters which they know are beyond the teacher’s control so they approach the administrator.

When Grace and Larry were having trouble convincing the primary school principal that Lola should be allowed to start at that school on the first day of the school year, Larry assertively told the principal that, if needed, he would go above her to get the matter resolved. Since Lola’s adoption was not going to be finalized until a few days after school started, the principal, following the school system’s protocol, did not grant their request, because technically Lola did not live in that school district until she was officially adopted by her grandparents. Larry was frustrated by the lack of flexibility on the part of the administrator and chose to by-pass her. *I said if you can’t decide this, tell me who I need to talk to. I know the superintendent, I know who I need to talk to and I don’t mind going over your head if that’s what it takes. But she’s (Lola) not going to start school three days behind everybody else or four days behind. She’s going to start when she’s supposed to.* His assertiveness paid off, because the principal relented, made some calls, and was given permission by the superintendent to enroll Lola in the school from day one. In another situation described in the previous chapter, Daisy also went directly to the principal to seek her help in getting her grandson to complete his social studies project, thereby bypassing the teacher. Both of these scenarios are powerful examples of grandparents positioning for advocacy so that “they can influence life in schools” (Barton et al., 2004, p. 8). Grandparents’ knowledge of what matters in child rearing, after having already raised one generation, can teach school and parents alike about how to advocate for students.
Mrs. Lee, on the other hand, chose to go through the ranks when she needed to address a problem Melia was having with a few students on the bus. Mrs. Lee shared the following as her response to Melia’s complaint - I’ve addressed the school, I’ve addressed the bus driver first and then after the bus driver didn’t give me any satisfaction, I went to the teacher and then I went to the principal. In another incident, Moon encouraged Brooke to let her know if she (Brooke) had any problems at school with her schoolwork or with her peers. If you can’t tell your teachers, you come and tell me and I’ll go to the school. You don’t have to struggle with it. If they don’t believe you, you just tell me and I will make sure the teachers know it, ‘cause kids are cruel. Just like parents in general, Moon was ready to go to the school without hesitation to ask the teachers for help or to defend her great-granddaughter if the circumstances warranted it.

Mrs. Lee also talked about how her grandchildren learn from her as they watch how she reacts to situations. She understood the need for her to model making wise choices by strategically dropping in at the school unannounced to check up on her grandchildren. They never know when I’m gonna pop up. And I say, you just never know, so it’s best to keep your p’s and q’s every time. So that kind of scares them, because it makes them, you know, whereas you playing the class clown, you don’t know when Mama gonna pop up there. And you don’t want to be playing the class clown.

Party, for example, was very comfortable with authoring her position with the neighborhood children and with her extended family. Mrs. Lee does the same thing with her church and beyond, including high school students and strangers that she meets when she goes out to talk to others about preventing domestic violence. Both Party and Mrs. Lee spoke about wanting to give back to the community and about helping others. For Party, it may come slowly,
because she is still not comfortable with going back to the prisons to talk to the Black men about how important they are in their children’s lives, but she plans to do it one day.

Mrs. Lee has already started being an activist in her community by spreading the word against domestic violence. *I want to shake up the world. I want to shake the world about domestic violence to the point where the abuser will say, “I gotta stop. I just got to stop.”* She wants to empower girls, especially, to say no when they are in an abusive relationship, and she is willing to share Naomi’s story, even if it means having to re-hash her death again and again. She feels that this is a very effective way to get the message across to the young girls in the schools and also hopefully reach out to the abusers and convince them to change for the better.

The Friday after her last interview with me, Mrs. Lee was going to a rally that she had a major part in organizing called “Stomping out Domestic Violence.” A few weeks earlier she was also at a memorial/domestic violence service for her daughter sponsored by Project Safe³. Mrs. Lee is an active supporter of this organization and together they visit schools to share her story and make people aware of domestic violence. She is excited that *it’s going to be even bigger next year ‘cause every year it gets bigger and bigger and we love it because we’re saving people through it. You know some people have called and said, “Mrs. Lee, we like that you’re doing this. Who would have thought that you would have put your family out there to do this? We know it’s painful for you to talk about [your daughter’s death], but you’re not looking at your pain. You’re trying to help us and other people” and that’s what we do.* Mrs. Lee’s commitment to spreading the word against domestic violence is further reflected in her other endeavors, namely, writing her story in a book entitled *XYZ*, composing a collection of poems inspired by her daughter and her faith in God called, *AB*, and preaching on a local radio broadcast every Friday.

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³ A locally-based non-profit organization working to end domestic violence through prevention and educational programs, crisis intervention, ongoing supportive services for survivors of domestic violence and their children.
Mrs. Lee was very excited to share about these publications and was especially proud of the weekly 15-minute radio broadcast because she wanted to reach as many people through the radio as I could. You know it’s enough for me preaching, but just to be able to get on that radio, more people are listening on that radio. And my daughter is the reason why I’ve started that, it’s because of her. Mrs. Lee is passionate about fighting domestic violence because she saw how it destroyed her daughter’s life. So she is eager to share her story, if only to save even one person from the same fate as her daughter, Naomi.

Through the Boys and Girls Club, Mrs. Lee has connected with an officer from the local Sheriff’s Department to visit high schools to talk about domestic violence and how students can seek help. I just want to inform everybody. Wherever there’s an opportunity, I want to talk about it. I am in the midst of making a photo album where it starts up with my baby, my girl as a baby growing up, one, two, three years old and on up until she gets to twenty and her obituary. And at the end, the point is my baby didn’t get to make it to nothing but 20, because she went down the wrong road. She chose the wrong people in her life. I need you to choose the right people so that you can see past twenty. You know, that’s why I want, I put it out there so, it’s hurtful to me, but if I can save you, then I’m doing my job, I’m doing my job. Mrs. Lee is relentless in her efforts to educate others about domestic violence. Her daughter was not able to survive this traumatic personal injustice but Mrs. Lee looked beyond her pain to try and help people in her community so that others will not have to endure what her daughter did. When I called to invite her to my doctoral defense in November 2012, she in turn asked me to come to an annual rally that she was leading at the local community center that week. I was thrilled and told her I would be there.

I was struck by the raw pain that I heard in the voices of the five victims of domestic violence who shared their stories but I was also very inspired to hear about their will to survived
and thrive despite the ordeal they encountered. Mrs. Lee’s closing speech at the rally spoke volumes about her willingness to open her heart to others. *If I could just save one person, save one mother from feeling the pain I still feel today, save one sister from the tears that my other daughters shed because they really miss their sister, save one child from never having their mama hold them in their arms, then I have done my job.*

**Limitations and Affordances**

From the beginning of my research study with grandparents raising grandchildren, I brought in my own biases as an Asian-Chinese who was not born or raised in the United States. When I was growing up, Americans, British, or anyone who was White or Black were considered “foreigners,” someone not to be trusted because of their western and liberal way of life, with loose morals and care-free lifestyles. This very biased view was made worse for Blacks because it was further reinforced by television shows that often depicted Black families as being of low-income and who were often associated with violence and drugs. I envisioned low-income Blacks living in dangerous places where drugs and gangs rule, their houses being dirty, messy, and that they did not speak proper English. Growing up in Singapore, a multi-cultural society, I interacted mainly with Chinese, Malay, and Indian people. The only Black person I actually met very briefly once was a neighbor’s friend. I did not even speak to a White person until I started working as a part-time banquet waitress at the six-star Grand Sheraton Hotel when I was 16. Looking back now, I wonder how my dad even agreed to let me marry an American, a White foreigner, someone who was not even remotely related to my race, ethnicity, or nationality.

My notions about White and Black people were formed after I came to the United States in 1988 as a college student and later as a teacher. In my teaching career I have interacted with families from almost every continent, Black, White, Asian and Hispanic families, and poor to
upper middle class families of many races, and for the past six years, I have been teaching in a mainly middle class, mostly White community. Visiting working-class families at home was a new experience for me. My fear of visiting my participants in areas that I was not familiar with or had heard were unsafe made me very cautious when I began visiting families. However, I realized that my anxiety was unfounded; when I got to know both Black families and White families from working class and middle class backgrounds in my study we all became more relaxed with each other.

It may be that my being in the role of a “stranger” (Deagan, 1995) put some families at ease in a way I had not anticipated. In some cases, families were eager to extend the study so that I could come back and visit them again. Working class families in my study, who all happened to be Black, seemed to be more open to sharing their stories, even when it meant highlighting problematic aspects of their lives (Party being incarcerated) or opening emotional wounds (Mrs. Lee sharing about the pain of her daughter’s murder). Clearly, my development of relationships with my participants and interpretations of what I learned with them was constrained in some ways by the limits of my own previous experiences and understandings. I made an effort to convey my genuine interest in and respect for my participants’ roles as grandparents raising grandchildren in challenging circumstances and felt that grandparents’ willingness to participate and tell their stories was in part a response to those efforts.

Another limitation to my study was that I was not able to obtain the help of the school principals in the middle class community of Oconee County to gain access to grandparents raising grandchildren. In speaking with teachers and school counselors, I know that there are more grandparent-led families in the county than the ones that I had been able to locate on my own, but for some reason or other, the principals did not respond to my numerous requests to
identify and help me contact these grandparents. So I had to resort to my own contacts. I would have preferred to gain access to all grandparents raising grandchildren in my school system and also to expand the study to include other school systems incorporating a mix of socioeconomic levels in both rural and urban settings where grandparents were raising grandchildren, so as to strengthen the validity of the results.

This brings us to another potential limitation, that is, my prior relationships as a former co-worker or teacher with several of my participants, namely Daisy, Hoke, Grace, and Larry. This was a concern because I had known them personally for several years prior to my research, in my role as a co-worker to Daisy, and a teacher to Grace’s and Larry’s granddaughter. In a sense, I question whether their responses were guarded or censored because they may have worried about revealing aspects of their family’s experiences and lives that might have changed my perception of them. Hence, I wonder if it would have been better to recruit participants with whom I did not have prior relationships. This would be a good future research project that I can look into as I delve deeper into this intriguing phenomenon.

My inexperience as an interviewer was also a limitation that I would like to acknowledge. This was my first major interviewing project and I went in not knowing what to expect or how to conduct myself. I had done several small interviewing projects for classes in graduate school, but nothing of this caliber. A mistake I made with Shay, one of my participants, was to start off asking for her personal information. My first interview with her was actually my third visit, because prior appointments had conflicted with last minute plans and she was not home when I got to her house. When we finally did meet, it felt hurried and she even admitted that she was busy but said she felt bad to reschedule again, so she decided to keep the appointment. I had the good intention of not wanting to take too much of her time, but in doing so I jumped straight into
asking about her demographic information. I realized almost immediately that it was a bad move because she literally stiffened up, as if I had intruded into her personal space, and was not very forthcoming in her interviews. I started on the wrong foot and this caused Shay to be less open with her answers and she was the only participant that I felt I did not have a good connection with. In retrospect, I should have asked her to start talking so she could lead the conversation and feel more comfortable about being interviewed.

Although there were a number of limitations and constraints that influenced the conduct of my research, I found that several aspects of strength in my design and approach to the research contributed to my being able to gather rich data to inform my understanding of the research questions I had posed. The decision to include both working class and middle class families, and both Black and White families, strengthened and added rich diversity to my study. The initial efforts to build a sense of trust and respect through my attending of meetings at the Community Council on Aging helped me to see grandparents in a proactive and empowering light. At the same time, the grandparents who were in attendance, as well as the director and staff of the support group, were able to get to know me and see that I had a genuine interest to learn from the grandparents.

Additionally, the decision to conduct more than one interview with each grandparent-led family gave me the opportunity to go back and ask new questions to clarify and deepen my understandings and helped to add credence to my research because I was able to reflect and add further analysis to my data with each visit and with each subsequent participant. The following entry in my researcher’s journal described how multiple visits helped me to not only have the opportunity to clarify ideas but it also helped to build a bond with my participants.
Daisy and Hoke warmly welcomed me back to their house this Saturday afternoon. She had prepared a delicious chicken with rice lunch for us to share together. This is my 3rd and final interview session with them but she has insisted that I come back next week to make some handmade greeting cards with her because I was fascinated by her talents…. I am learning with each interview to help my participants and I to stay focused on the interview topic and not let it overlap too much. It is an interesting process of revising the questions depending on participants' response. The participants so far have been very forthcoming and I really respect and am in awe of all that they do for their grandchildren. They have so much strength to want the best for their grandchildren.

(Field notes: 11/17/11)

Like Daisy and Hoke, the rest of my participants also willingly and patiently listened to my questions when I came back to ask for clarification or elaboration. In addition, the inclusion of grandparents and grandchildren together in the final family collage activity also allowed me to gather data from multiple points of view and perspectives, and afforded opportunities to identify commonalities among the experiences of my participants, as well as unique perspectives developed by each of them that were linked to their particular histories and contexts. These different approaches in research and research design afforded and opened up different opportunities for gathering and interpreting data and allowed me to capitalize on the rich stories and perspectives offered by my participants.

Although I was a little hesitant initially, I took up my doctoral chair’s suggestion to invite my grandparent participants to the oral defense of my dissertation. Six out of eight were able to attend, and together with my family, friends, and three doctoral students, one of whom is a young lady from China who was herself raised by grandparents, it brought the total present at
my defense to 22 people. Everyone present was either a grandparent raising grandchildren or they were interested in the topic. Each person introduced themselves and shared about their connection with me, the researcher, and then after my research presentation they were encouraged to give their feedback. I was pleasantly surprised and deeply touched by the thoughtful input I received from them and I was most humbled by the supportive feedback the grandparents gave about how much they enjoyed being a part of the study. They voiced their appreciation of being heard and each grandparent participant specifically mentioned that this study has given them hope because they have now found and met others who have had similar experiences and could relate to their experiences of being a grandparent raising grandchildren. I was touched by the effect my study and presentation had on my audience because by the time I finished presenting my work, several people had tears in their eyes. The one sentiment shared by all my participants was the comforting knowledge that they now know they are not alone in their efforts to raise their grandchildren. Here are a few excerpts from their feedback:

Daisy:  *From this experience today I've just made the connection within myself that my husband and I are not alone. We don’t belong to the organization Grandparents Raising Grandchildren. We’re just in Oconee County, out in the fields, doing the best we can with our grandchildren. And so Jackie has brought the awareness to me, and I guess in the back of my mind I knew, and I guess, and I’ve always known, that there are grandparents raising grandchildren. But I mean, I guess, I was just isolated with our experience with it, and our struggles and our sacrifices, and what we give to our grandchildren and the proudness that we have of them. All of you, all who are grandparents, I can see that you’re just as proud of your grandchildren as we are of ours. It’s this awareness that brings us altogether that I really appreciate being here.*
Moon: Well, I learned a lot and it’s good to know that there’s a lot of people that’s raising their grandchildren and you can get help if you need it and you know you don’t ever have to be afraid to do that if you need to. I really enjoyed this and it’s really helped me and I appreciated you (the researcher) coming to my home to help me when you did. I really learned a lot. You taught us that there is help out there.

Mrs. Lee: I learned that we as grandparents feels like sometimes we [are] the only one and with your (researcher’s) information that you put out there, now we know that we’re not alone, that all of us are still striving to do, you know, being a grandparent than being a parent is a whole lot different. And you taught us that there is help even with the different situations we learn from different grandparents with the information that you gave. Now we know that we can go over somebody’s head to get the help that we need. That was very informative. You did a very good job. This was emotional, very emotional. You did a very good job. It taught me that you listened, you listened to us, you put it down, what we’re struggling with, and you brought it up, the parts, so now we got the information, we can use that to help us in the school system.

Additionally, the grandparents had a lively discussion about resources and strategies they have used to help their grandchildren in their schooling and learning. When Moon voiced her concerns about not knowing the new math that her great-granddaughter is being taught today and was asking about getting help, Party shared that she was able to obtain tutors through the school system and she also told Grace about the mentoring program that all of her grandchildren participate in through the local university. Both Grace and Moon stated that they were not aware of such resources available in their county and they were very enthusiastic about finding out how they could get this help.
Several of my guests also voiced the need for me to share my research with teachers and school systems. Hoke summed this up when he said: *This makes Jackie’s research very valuable.* My wife and I are very touched by her work. *This is a tool that can and should be used by school systems.* One of the doctoral committee members, a professor, told the grandparents that she is *inspired by their stories* and tenacity to *go to bat for their grandchildren.* My doctoral chair very eloquently thanked them for their extremely valuable contribution to this study because their *narratives and stories told us in a deeper way* and added a very personal and human aspect to the generally statistical information that is reported in research works about grandparents raising grandchildren. The impact that their stories will have on future work, especially in teacher education was acknowledged and recognized as a very powerful tool that we can use.

**Future Research**

There are multiple players in the interactions among grandparents raising grandchildren, their grandchildren, the sometimes hidden or absent original parents of the grandchildren, and teachers and other educators in schools. Through my research, I was able to explore in depth the perspectives of a small group of grandparents raising grandchildren, and to gain some insight into their grandchildren’s perspectives. After reviewing the findings and limitations in my study, I have formulated some ideas for future research that could help grandparents who are raising grandchildren as well as teachers, administrators, and other school personnel who work with the members of grandparent-led families.

First, I would recommend the need for research with different groups of grandparents, and different aged children, and then the need for research with the absent or previous parents. This study could also be a stepping stone for research with teachers who have experience with grandparents raising grandchildren, gaining teachers’ perspectives regarding working with
grandparent-led families. There is a need for research on teacher education, because as Theriot and Tice (2008) found, some teachers may have need encouragement to reflect and rethink some of their beliefs and practices that may not be accurate or true. There is also a need to convince teachers about the effectiveness of family involvement (Martin & Hagan-Burke, 2002; Uludag, 2008) involving innovative and effective approaches (Lazar et al., 1999). Teacher educators and professional developers could plan community field experiences where teacher candidates or practicing teachers (Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2011) might be able to interact with grandparents raising grandchildren and their grandchildren in meaningful ways, in the context of groups such as the Community Council for Aging (see Appendix K) or through home visits (McIntyre et al., 2001).

Additionally, teacher educators and researchers will be able to build upon this study to investigate the ways that educators might draw on grandparents’ unique funds of knowledge. Allen (2010) suggests we can do this through mutual trust and through the use of “reciprocity, a healthy interdependency, (which) is critical for enduring relationships (whereby) both teachers and parents give in ways that support each other, and that support the child’s learning” (p 30). This process will help to enhance classroom instruction by showing school personnel ways to work effectively and collaboratively in support of grandparents’ endeavors to raise and educate their grandchildren (Mauderer, 2008). Finally, this study could help inform the need for research with both preservice and inservice teacher education by sharing the knowledge we all gained from the research with grandparents and explore how teachers’ learning (Altwerger et al., 2004; Theriot & Tice, 2008; Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2011) might contribute to building more supportive relationships with grandparents raising grandchildren and families living in other diverse family structures.
My participants' voices conveyed powerfully the sense of how each of them have doggedly and insistently created and recreated a parenting presence at home and at school with their grandchildren. As a teacher-researcher, I am intrigued by the power of the bond, intensity, and relentlessness of the caring of the grandparents who are raising grandchildren. They sacrifice so much but they also acknowledge the blessings they receive from being a custodial grandparent. As a teacher, I have so much to learn from them and I hope that my study will inspire future researchers, pre-service teachers, and practicing teachers to act on what they can learn from my study.

Boolie, one of the grandchildren that I interviewed, aptly summed up his appreciation and recognition of his grandparents when he stated, *If somebody asked me, do I have any regrets, I really don’t because if I didn’t have lived that life the way I did, I wouldn’t have known what I did right now. I wouldn’t change anything...if I didn’t live with my grandparents I wouldn’t be who I am and that’s why I’m glad I live with my grandparents. They’ve been there for me.* Just as Boolie is grateful that he has his grandparents, all my participants voiced immense love and deep appreciation for the joys their grandchildren have brought them. Party put it simply when she said *I’m just blessed and if I had to do it again, I would because I want to see them* (grandchildren) *happy.*
REFERENCES


Conway, P., Boeckel, J., Shuster, L., & Wages, J. (2010). Grandparent caregivers' use of resources and services, level of burden, and factors that mediate their relationships. Journal of Intergenerational Relationships, 8(2), 128-144.

doi:10.1080/15350771003741931


doi:10.1002/pits.20170


Houtman, S. (2006). *To grandma's house, we...stay.* St. Louis, MS: Quick Publishing.


### APPENDICES

**Appendix A**

**Timeline for Conducting the Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 2011</td>
<td>Submitted IRB application; contacted CCA and Oconee County School System.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2011</td>
<td>Obtained permission from CCA and Oconee County School System to conduct my research work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July - Aug. 2011</td>
<td>Recruited and selected participants - attended CCA meeting to personally invite grandparents to participate in my study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2011</td>
<td>Received IRB approval. Sent emails to Oconee County principals and letters to grandparents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid Nov. 2012</td>
<td>Second defense/presentation with invited guests - my participants, other grandparents, graduate students, and teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End Nov. 2012</td>
<td>Final revisions on dissertation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2012</td>
<td>Graduation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Verbal Script for CCA

Hello grandparents! I want to thank you and Ms. Katie for giving me a chance to tell you why I am here. My name is Jaqueline Shoemaker and I am a 1st grade teacher in Watkinsville. I am originally from Singapore and I am the youngest of 13 children. I came to America in 1988 and have lived here for 16 years. My husband, Greg, works at UGA, and we have four children. I also attend school at UGA as a doctoral student at UGA, working under the direction of Dr. Martha Allexsaht-Snider, Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education, and I would like to conduct a study to learn about your experiences as grandparents raising grandchildren. The title of my research is "Family Stories about Schooling and Learning: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren."

Over the course of my twenty years of teaching, I have noticed that there are more and more grandparents who are raising grandchildren. As a teacher, I find myself challenged to know how to relate to grandparents, like you, who are parenting for the second time around. I want you to teach me how to be more effective in serving and helping grandparents who are raising grandchildren. I humbly invite you to participate because your input will be very valuable to me, other teachers, school personnel, and researchers.

Your participation will involve three 60-90 minute recorded interviews with me between October 2011-March 2012 at a location and time that is convenient to you. During the 3rd interview, you and your grandchild will have the opportunity to engage in a fun and creative activity of making a family collage to depict things about your family that you would like teachers and administrators to know about.

If this study is of interest to you, please fill in the form that I am passing out and I will collect them before you leave today. I will use the information you give to contact you at a convenient time to go over more details about this study. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at (706) 248-1387 or by email at Jaq@uga.edu Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jaqueline Shoemaker

Yes, I am interested in participating in this study entitled, "Family Stories about Schooling and Learning: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren." My information is

Name: _______________________________  Date: ____________
My grandchild(ren) is/are in ________________________________ grade.
I (circle one) have/do not have legal guardianship of my grandchild(ren).
My Tel: _______________________________
My Email: _______________________________
My Address: _______________________________
A good time to call is (day) ____________ (time) ____________
I prefer to be contacted by (circle one)  Email    Phone


Appendix C

Oconee County Schools’ Request for Research Projects

Name: Jaqueline Shoemaker.
Date: July 21, 2011.
College/University: University of Georgia.
Position: Doctoral student.

Purpose of Research Project: The main goal for this qualitative study is to investigate the growing trend of grandparents raising grandchildren. By interviewing them, I hope to learn from grandparents about how they became parents for the second time around, the strengths they bring to their relationships with their grandchildren and the schools, the challenges they have faced, and the strategies they have used to address those challenges. I will use my findings to help me, the teacher, understand this growing phenomenon so that I can effectively serve the grandparents and students in my classroom. I will share my findings with educators and researchers about what I learn from families headed by grandparents. I hope to suggest ways that teachers can draw on the grandparents’ knowledge and life experiences, regarding them as a valuable resource to enhance classroom instruction so that we can work effectively and collaboratively to support grandparents in their endeavors to raise and educate their grandchildren.

Research Method(s): 3 interviews per participant including one group activity (creating a family collage) during the 3rd interview.
Project Timeline: Six months: October 2011 – March 2012.

Involvement: Oconee County Schools
Number of teachers: 0 (zero).
Number of students: Minimum of 3*
Number of families: Minimum of 3*
* The number of students and families will be dependent on the number of grandparents who respond to my letter of invitation but I would like to have at least three (3) grandparents and students from Oconee included in my study. However, I do not want to turn away grandparents who are interested in participating so I could include up to 6 grandparents if that many express an interest.

Attachments required:
Copy of instrument/survey to be administered (if applicable)
Sample letter to teachers/families giving an explanation of the project
Copy of consent forms for human subjects

Please limit your submission request to this form and the items requested.

Signature of Applicant

Date
Appendix D

Email to Oconee County Principals
Dear Mrs. A, Mr. B, Mr. C, Mr. D, Mrs. E, Mrs. F, Mrs. G, Mrs. H, Mrs. I, and Mrs. J,

Greetings! My name is Jaqueline Shoemaker and I am a 1st grade teacher at Oconee County Primary School. I am currently working on my doctoral degree at UGA and am in the process of writing my proposal for my dissertation study.

The title of my study is "Family Stories about Schooling and Learning: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren." Over the course of my twenty years of teaching, I have noticed that there are more and more grandparents who are raising grandchildren. As a teacher, I find myself challenged to know how to relate to grandparents who are parenting for the second time around.

Hence the purpose of my study is to learn how I can be more effective in serving and helping grandparents who are raising grandchildren and eventually I hope to share my findings with other teachers and school personnel.

My proposed method for data collection is to conduct three interviews per participant at a location and time that is convenient to them (usually in their home). During the 3rd interview, they will also make a family collage with their grandchild to depict things about their family that they would like teachers and administrators to know about.

In order for me to conduct this study I need your help with the following:

1) Identify grandparents in your school who are raising grandchildren. These grandparents do not need to have legal custody but should be listed as the adult who is responsible for the Pre-K to 12th grade student (regardless of whether a parent is absent or present in the child’s life).

2) Send home a letter of invitation (that I will provide) to the grandparents. This letter will include an information sheet that they can mail to me if they are interested in participating in this study so that I can contact them.

3) Please email me the number of possible participants as soon as possible so that I can send the copies to you via interschool mail. Each letter will have a stamped self-addressed envelope so grandparents can mail their responses directly to me.

Lynda Hale has granted permission for me to contact you and to request for your help. My IRB (Institutional Review Board) application and approval to conduct research will be on file at UGA. If you need additional information or clarification, please feel free to contact me at JShoemaker@Oconeeschools.org (706) 248-1387 or my doctoral chair, Dr. Martha Allexsaht-Snider at Marthaas@uga.edu or (706) 542-4244.

Sincerely,
Jaqueline Shoemaker
Appendix E

Letter to Oconee County Grandparents

Dear _____________________,

Hello! My name is Jaqueline Shoemaker and I am a 1st grade teacher at Oconee County Primary School. I am a mother of four children who have either graduated from or are attending Oconee County High School. I am also a doctoral student at UGA, working under the direction of Dr. Martha Allexsaht-Snider, Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education, and I would like to conduct a study about grandparents raising grandchildren. The title of my study is "Family Stories about Schooling and Learning: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren."

Over the course of my twenty years of teaching, I have noticed that there are more and more grandparents who are raising grandchildren. As a teacher, I find myself challenged to know how to relate to grandparents, like you, who are parenting for the second time around. I want to learn how to be more effective in serving and helping grandparents who are raising grandchildren. I invite you to participate in this study because your input will be very valuable to me, other teachers, school personnel, and researchers.

Your principal, __________________________, has suggested that you may be a possible participant for my study. The purpose of my research is to learn how I can be more effective in serving and helping grandparents who are raising grandchildren and eventually I hope to share my findings with other teachers and school personnel.

Your participation will involve three 60-90 minute recorded interviews with me between October 2011-March 2012 at a location and time that is convenient to you. During the 3rd interview, you and your grandchild will have the opportunity to engage in a fun and creative activity of making a family collage to depict things about your family that you would like teachers and administrators to know about.

If this study is of interest to you, please return the bottom portion below in the enclosed stamped self-addressed envelope as soon as possible so I can contact you at a convenient time to go over more details about the study. Please feel free to contact me at JShoemaker@Oconeeschools.org or my doctoral chair, Dr. Martha Allexsaht-Snider at marthaas@uga.edu or call us at (706) 248-1387 or (706) 542-4244. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jaqueline Shoemaker

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Yes, I am interested in participating in this study entitled, "Family Stories about Schooling and Learning: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren." My information is

Name: ____________________________________ Date: ________________

My grandchild(ren) is/are in ________________________________ grade.

I (circle one) have/do not have legal guardianship of my grandchild(ren).

My Tel: ____________________________

My Email: __________________________________________

My Address: ________________________________

A good time to call is (day) ______________ (time) ______________

I prefer to be contacted by (circle one) Email Phone
Appendix F

Grandparent’s Consent Form

Dear _______________________.

You are being invited to participate in this research study entitled, “Family Stories about Schooling and Learning: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren.” Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can ask to have all the information about you returned to you, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The main objective of this study is to explore the social and cultural factors that influence grandparents raising grandchildren by examining how grandparents construct and view their roles and how they think the school can help them in their endeavors of helping their grandchildren in their education.

You may benefit from participation by learning more about the research process as well as have the opportunity to reflect on your experience as a grandparent raising grandchildren. Additionally, I (researcher) hope this will benefit me and other educators so that we can learn ways of how teachers, administrators, and other school personnel can work effectively and collaboratively to support grandparents in your endeavors to raise and educate their grandchildren.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

2. Create one family collage with your grandchild.

The researcher wishes to make audio-tapes of the interviews and video-tape the family collage activity. Please check the appropriate box below if you are willing to allow the researcher to audiotape your voice during your interviews and videotape your person during the collage activity.

No risks are anticipated from participation in this study.

The researcher will keep your and your grandchild’s identity confidential. The results of this participation will be confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without prior consent, unless otherwise required by law. You and your grandchild will be assigned pseudonyms and they will be used on all labels, transcripts, and writings about the research. Audiotapes of the interviews and any individually identifying information collected from you will be kept in a locked file which only the researcher can access. All audio tape recordings will be stored in a flash drive with a security password that only the researcher will
know. This flash drive will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s home. All recordings will be destroyed on December 31, 2013.

Any individually-identifiable information collected about me will be kept confidential unless otherwise required by law. The researcher will answer any questions about the research now, or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at (706) 248-1387 or email at jaq@uga.edu I may also contact the professor supervising the research, Dr. Martha Allexsaht-Snider, at (706) 542-4244 or marthaas@uga.edu

Jaqueline Shoemaker
Name of Researcher                                  Signature                                  Date
Address: Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education
629 Aderhold Hall, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia

I agree _____ I do not agree _____ to participate in the interview for the research study and to have his/her interview audio-taped.

I agree _____ I do not agree _____ to share the audio recording of my interview and Family Collage activity for the research study.

I agree _____ I do not agree _____ to be videotaped during the Family Collage activity for the research study.

I agree _____ I do not agree _____ to give permission to the researcher to write, publish, and present the findings from my participation in the research, using a pseudonym to protect my identity.

I understand the project described above. My questions have been answered and I agree for my grand/children to participate in this project. I have received a copy of this form.

_________________________________________  __________________________  ______________
Name of Participant                                Signature                                      Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your grand/children’s rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail irb@uga.edu
Appendix G

Parent’s/Grandparent’s Permission Form

I agree to allow my grand/children, _____________________, to take part in a research study titled, “Family Stories about Schooling and Learning: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren,” which is being conducted by Mrs. Jaqueline Shoemaker, Graduate Student, from the Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Martha Alleexsaht-Snider. My grand/children’s participation is voluntary which means I do not have to allow my grand/children to be in this study if I do not want to. My grand/children can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which she/he is otherwise entitled. I can ask to have the information that can be identified as my grand/children’s returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for the study is to explore the social and cultural factors that influence grandparents raising grandchildren by examining how grandparents construct and view their roles and how they think the school can help them in their endeavors of helping their grandchildren in their education.

Children who take part may benefit from participation by learning more about the research process as well as have the opportunity to reflect on their experience growing up with their grandparents and how grandparents help them with their schooling and learning at home and at school. Additionally, my grand/children will also have the opportunity to make a family collage that will help teachers to understand and appreciate the relationship that my grand/children shares with his/her grandparent. All materials for this collage will be provided by the researcher.

The researcher hopes this study will benefit herself and other educators and researchers so that they can learn ways of how teachers, administrators, and other school personnel can work effectively and collaboratively to support grandparents in their endeavors to raise and educate their grandchildren.

If I allow my grand/children to take part, my grand/children will be asked to answer some questions about his or her perceptions about living with grandparents and how he or she thinks his or her grandparents helps with schooling and learning at school and at home.

During the Family Collage activity, my grand/children’s conversations and interactions with his/her grandparent as they create their personalized family collage would be audio and video recorded. If I agree for my grand/children to participate in this research study, he/she will be asked to:

1) Let the researcher use the audio recording of this family collage activity as part of her research study. This Family Collage activity will take approximately 45 minutes.
2) Be videotaped while participating in the Family Collage activity.
3) Be interviewed so that the researcher can share my grand/children’s perception about being raised by his/her grandparent with other educators and researchers so they can learn how to work collaboratively with grandparents to help them in educating the grandchildren.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study. Because of my grand/children’s participation in the research, he/she may increase what he/she knows about his/her grandparents and how their working together can help my grand/children in school and at home.

The research is not expected to cause any harm or discomfort. My grand/children can quit at any time. My grand/children’s choice about participating in this research will not affect him/her in any way. I understand that my grand/children can participate in the Family Collage activity even if he/she chooses NOT to participate in the research.

My grand/children will choose his/her own pseudonym and his/her name will not be used on any papers regarding this study. All information about this project will be kept in a secured location and all individually identifiable information and codes will be removed after 2 years.

Any individually-identifiable information collected about my grand/children will be kept confidential unless otherwise required by law. The researcher will answer any questions about the research now, or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at (706) 248-1387 or email at jaq@uga.edu I may also contact the professor supervising the research, Dr. Martha Allexsaht-Snider, at (706) 542-4244 or marthaas@uga.edu

Jaqueline Shoemaker ________________________
Name of Researcher ________________________ Signature __________________________ Date
Address: Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education 629 Aderhold Hall, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia

I agree _____ I do not agree _____ for my grand/children to participate in the interview for the research study and to have his/her interview audio-taped.

I agree _____ I do not agree _____ to share the audio recording of my grand/children’s interview and Family Collage activity for the research study.

I agree _____ I do not agree _____ for my grand/children to be videotaped during the Family Collage activity for the research study.

I agree _____ I do not agree _____ to give permission to the researcher to write, publish, and present the findings from my grand/children’s participation in the research, using pseudonyms for my grand/children to protect his/her identity(ies).

I understand the project described above. My questions have been answered and I agree for my grand/children to participate in this project. I have received a copy of this form.

Name of Grand/Parent ________________________ Signature __________________________ Date
Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.
Additional questions or problems regarding your grand/children’s rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail irb@uga.edu
Dear ________________.

I, Jaqueline Shoemaker, under the direction of Dr. Martha Allexsaht-Snider, Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education, University of Georgia, wish to conduct a research study entitled, “Family Stories about Schooling and Learning: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren.” As part of this study, I am going to ask your grandparent and you some questions and you will also have the opportunity to create a family collage that will help teachers to understand and appreciate the relationship that you share with your grandparent.

During this Family Collage activity, with my permission, I will audio and video record your conversations and interactions with your grandparent as you create your personalized family collage. All materials for this collage will be provided by me. If you agree to participate in this research study, you will be asked to:

1) Let us use the audio recording of this family collage activity as part of my research study. This Family Collage activity will take approximately 45 minutes.

2) Be videotaped while participating in the Family Collage activity.

3) Be interviewed so that you can share your perception about being raised by your grandparent and have the interview audio-taped.

You can participate in this Family Collage activity even if you choose NOT to participate in the research. Your choice about participating in this research will not affect you in any way. We will not use your name on any papers that we write about this project. Because of your participation in the research, you may increase what you know about your grandparents and how your working together can help you in school and at home. We hope to learn something about grandparents raising grandchildren that will help me and other teachers in the future.

There are no serious risks or discomforts associated with this study. You might feel some discomfort talking about your family with me, the researcher. If you do feel uncomfortable, you can stop talking about those things and you can talk to your grandparents about your feelings.

No individually-identifiable information about you, or provided by you during the research, will be shared with others without your written permission.

If you refuse to participate or want to stop participating in the research project, you are free to do so at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can also choose not to answer questions that you don't want to answer. If you have any questions or concerns, you can always ask us or call us at the following numbers: (706) 248-1387 or (706) 542-4244.
Sincerely,
Jaqueline Shoemaker

Name of Researcher ___________________________ Signature ___________________________ Date

Address: Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education
629 Aderhold Hall, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia

Below, please print your name, mark the parts of the research you choose to participate in, and then sign the form.

I agree _____ I do not agree _____ to participate in the interview for the research study and to have my interview audio-taped.

I agree _____ I do not agree _____ to share the audio recording of my interview and Family Collage activity for the research study.

I agree _____ I do not agree _____ to be videotaped during the Family Collage activity for the research study.

I agree _____ I do not agree _____ to give permission to the researcher to write, publish, and present the findings from my participation in the research, using a pseudonym to protect my identity.

I understand the project described above. My questions have been answered and I agree to participate in this project pending my parent’s/grandparent’s approval. I have received a copy of this form.

_______________________ ___________________________ ___________________________
Name of Participant Signature Date
Appendix I

Minor Assent Script

I want to see if you would be willing to help us with a research project about your grandparents’ experiences of raising grandchildren. As part of this study, I am going to ask you some questions about growing up with your grandparents and how they help you with your schooling and learning at home and at school. I want to know things that kids think about, things that they feel, and things that they do. These questions are different from school because there is no right or wrong answer. I just want to know what you really think.

You will also have the opportunity to make a family collage that will help teachers to understand and appreciate the relationship that you share with your grandparent. During this Family Collage activity, if you agree, I will audio and video record you talking with your grandparent as you create your family collage together.

If you decide to do the project with us, your answers will be kept just between you and me. I may not be able to keep this promise if you tell me that you or another child is being hurt in some way. If that were happening, I would tell someone to help keep you or the other child safe. You can also decide to stop at any time or can choose not to answer questions that you don’t want to answer.

Do you have any questions? Would you be willing to do the project with us?

Do I have your permission to audio-record your assent?

Do you agree to participate in the Family Collage activity?

Do you agree for the activity to be videotaped?

Do you agree to participate in the interview?

Do you agree for the interview to be audio-recorded?

Please state your name

Please state your grandparent’s name who is participating in this study.

__________________________
Child's signature (when age appropriate)
Appendix J

Interview Protocol

**Interview #1**
This interview protocol was used as a guide to elicit participants’ narratives about their personal histories and stories up to the time when they became a grandparent raising grandchildren. This interview helped build the basis for grandparents to further explore their experiences as grandparents raising grandchildren. It provided contextual information about their experiences to situate their present position as the adult who is responsible for their grandchild. I encouraged participants to narrate a range of constitutive events in their past that now places them as grandparents raising grandchildren.

**INTRO:** I am going to ask some questions to learn about your personal history and stories up to the time you became a grandparent raising grandchildren. With all of my questions, you should feel free to let me know if you don’t want to answer a question or if you want to elaborate further on any question. I will use these questions as a starting point and then see where you want to take the interview.

**Please tell me about your life before you became a grandparent raising grandchildren.**
- First, tell me about your family (parents, siblings, and other relatives)
- Where did you go to school and what was your schooling experience like?
- How would you describe the schools now as compared to when you were involved with schools as a parent the first time (differences and similarities)?
- What kind of profession did/do you have before you took full responsibility for your grandchild?
- What was your relationship like with your grandchild and what role did you play in their education before you started being your grandchild’s primary guardian?
- Tell me about your social networks - Who do you turn to when you need help and who do you help in your family and in your community? (Who are the people you get support from and who are the people you support?)

**Interview #2**
This interview was used to focus on details of participants’ experiences as grandparents before and after being fully responsible for their grandchild. I asked grandparents to examine their experiences in the context of their social setting (their relationships with their grandchildren, children, other relatives, teachers, administrators, other grandparents, and the wider community). I encouraged them to explore challenging situations and to describe how they faced these situations and the strategies they used.

**INTRO:** I am going to ask some questions to learn about your experiences before and after you became fully responsible for your grandchild. With all of my questions, you should feel free to let me know if you don’t want to answer a question or if you want to elaborate further on any question. I will use these questions as a starting point and then see where you want to take the interview.
Please tell me about your life after you became a grandparent raising grandchildren.

- Tell me about your grandparenting experiences now. How did you come to this role of being the primary caregiver of your grandchild?
- Why did you decide to take responsibility for your grandchild? Describe a turning point, if any, that influenced this decision?
- Do you have legal guardianship? If yes, tell me about your experience to gain guardianship? What did you have to do? How long? Who helped you? How does your guardianship status influence your relations with your grandchild’s school?
- Please tell me about your life after you became a grandparent raising grandchildren.
- How does your guardianship status influence your relations with your grandchild’s school?
- Describe a typical day for you from the time you get up to the time you go to bed.
- Tell me about how you have used your life experiences to help your grandchild in his/her schooling and education at home and at school.
- Tell me about your experiences with your grandchild’s teachers/school.
- As you worked with your grandchild in his/her education, did you see differences between what you expected and what you have actually experienced? What are these differences?
- How do you participate in your grandchild’s school? How do you see your participation in the school community?
- How have youengaged with teachers and administrators at the school? What kinds of things have you talked about or worked on with teachers and administrators at the school?
- What do you is your role in educating your grandchild?
- Do you think the generational gap puts you at a disadvantage as you help your grandchild? Why?

**Interview #3**

This interview was used to encourage participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences of raising grandchildren. Using what we have covered in the first two interviews, participants were asked to explore and reflect about how they thought they have helped their grandchild in his/her education. At the end of this interview, I invited their grandchild to work with the grandparent to create a family collage to depict aspects about their family that they would like teachers to know about their family. This included any or all of the following: their beliefs, values, family activities, traditions, customs, and support systems.

**INTRO:** I am going to ask some questions to give you a chance to reflect with me on the meanings of your experiences with raising your grandchildren for you and for other grandparents and educators. With all of my questions, you should feel free to let me know if you don’t want to answer a question or if you want to elaborate further on any question. I will use these questions as a starting point and then see where you want to take the interview.

**Please tell me about your role as your grandchild’s primary care-giver.**

- How do you think of yourself now as a grandparent raising grandchildren?
- Please tell me about your role as your grandchild’s primary care-giver.
• Who do you think is responsible for educating your grandchild?
• Which life experiences you described in previous interviews have shaped the way you are helping your grandchild in his/her schooling and learning?
• Tell me about the times when your efforts to help in your grandchild’s schooling at home affected other students, teachers, parents, and school administrators positively.
• Tell me about the times when your efforts to help in your grandchild’s schooling at school affected other students, teachers, parents, and school administrators positively.
• What do you see as strengths that you bring to support your grandchild’s education at home and at school? Who and what contributed to your strengths?
• Describe an incident when you called on these strengths. What strategies did you use? What was the outcome?
• What else would you like to tell me about your experiences of raising and educating your grandchild? What have you learned that might help other grandparents raising grandchildren?
• What do you feel the school could provide to ensure that your grandchild gets the education you think s/he needs?
• How do you think teachers and administrators could better support grandparents raising grandchildren?
• Given what we have talked about in these interviews, what do you want teachers to know about your life and your experiences that can help you educate your grandchild?
• What advice about education do you have for other grandparents raising grandchildren?
• What are the main ways your life has changed?
• Where do you see yourself going in the future?

Minor’s Interview
This interview was conducted informally either during the Family Collage activity or after. The questions were modified according to the minor’s age.

INTRO: I am interested in knowing more about how your grandparent helps you with learning and with schooling.

• What are some things your grandparent has helped you to learn? How did your grandparent help you to learn these things?
• Tell me about a time when your grandparent visited your school or classroom?
• What would you tell someone who was going to live with their grandparents about what it is like to live with your grandparent?
• What else would you like to tell me about your experiences of living with your grandparent? What have you learned that might help other children who are living with their grandparents know about?
• Tell me some things you like about living with grandma/pa.
• What do you want teachers to know about your life and your experiences so that they can help you and your grandparent?
Questions about Family Collages
This interview was conducted informally after the Family Collage activity as the grandparent and grandchild shared the collage with me. The questions were modified according to the minor’s age.

**INTRO:** I am interested in knowing about your family collage.

- Tell me about your family collage.
- What does this (refer to a particular part of the collage) tell me about your family?
- What are some things from this collage that you would like to highlight to teachers and administrators? Why?
Appendix K

Community Council on Aging (CCA)

I was introduced to CCA by one of the professors in my doctoral committee. In the summer of 2011, I met with Katie, the program director of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and went to their monthly support group meetings, which is open to all grandparent caregivers in the area. Katie is in charge of writing the grant every summer as it is due in mid July and they are notified of the outcome in August. However, in 2011, the notification only arrived in October which was “nerve-wrecking” but she was relieved and excited when they finally received the grant which allotted CCA everything they had requested.

Working with six social workers interns from the local university each year, CCA provides case management service to thirty families. Each social worker is assigned to five or six families that they visit several times a month to help them set and achieve goals. After assessing the family’s needs these case workers help the grandparents find resources and assistance for materials/help such as beds, install door, or guide them to a wide variety of services such as the Book Bag program, Meals on Wheels, and legal education and services. Additionally, two nurses conduct regular home visits to check on grandparents’ vitals and medications and to help monitor their health needs.

At the monthly grandparent support group meetings, guests speakers such as attorneys and professionals familiar with federal resources (TANF or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, adoption), and students from the university sharing and teaching food and exercise classes, food demonstration, and healthy eating. An example of such talks could include a cooking demonstration on how to cook collared greens and grilled cheese in a healthy way so grandparents become aware about what they eat and how they can make it healthy. CCA provides the food box so grandparents can try making the food for free. Fliers containing information about each monthly meeting are distributed to grandparents through their case workers and posted in public places. Lunch and childcare are provided at these meetings so as to make it as feasible for the grandparents to attend and be nourished as well as have a time to talk, share, and meet other grandparents.

One of the talks I attended over the summer was about how to talk about sex education with a child or teenager. I could tell from their body language (squirming, embarrassed smile) that the topic was uncomfortable for some of the grandparents but on the other hand other grandparents like Taylor had a very matter-of-fact and practical stance towards teaching children about sex. Taylor is a grandparent in her mid-50’s who is raising three grandchildren. She shared with the group that her 12-year old grandson was asking about sex and she said she’d rather “he know about protection than for him to get someone pregnant.” I struggled with this train of thought because of my personal beliefs but I also realized that abstinence-only education does not work for everyone. I respected these grandparents for going out of their comfort zone to support their grandchildren. I am amazed at how open-minded they are about sex education.

Perhaps they realized that the possibility of having another child to take care of is worse than providing their grandchildren with the resources to prevent pregnancies.

CCA also provides grand-family activities so that grandparents and grandchildren can enjoy fun activities together. These include sponsored gifts drive when children write about two things they want and these are usually granted through the generosity of private organizations and sponsors. The gifts, including presents for the grandparents too, are distributed at the annual
Christmas dinner in the second week of December. They are bought and gift-wrapped by many volunteers who come in to help and/or to obtain service hours. I was able to experience this gift-wrapping project first-hand last December when I volunteered to help. The project drew over 100 volunteers who worked tirelessly for four hours to carefully wrap and decorate the gifts. The following week I attended the family Christmas party and got to witness the joy on the grandparents’ faces as they collected the gifts while the children played on the bouncy castle. In one of her interviews, Party said if not for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren they would not have a good Christmas and she did not know how she would cope without them.

Additionally in April, another family event, “Spring Fun Days,” takes place. This fundraiser is very popular with the children as it has a carnival atmosphere with games and inflatable play equipment, train rides, face painting, and food. Transportation to this and all the above events is provided and often CCA also transports grandparents to their appointments including those for medical, SSN, and to the Department of Family and Child Services. They also give with bus passes and emergency aid from grants for utility bills. CCA has many volunteer opportunities and they welcome help. According to the director of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, their best advocates and advertisement are the grandparents that they serve. The testimonies from these grandparents inspire corporations and individuals to help this organization and they also encourage other grandparents who are in similar situation to seek help from CCA.